

IMPLEMENTING AN ONLINE ORIENTATION COURSE TO PREPARE  
MASTER'S STUDENTS OF UNITED THEOLOGICAL  
SEMINARY FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
DEDICATION.....	viii
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	ixi
ABBREVIATIONS .....	xi
EPIGRAPH.....	xiii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS .....	6
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	25
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS .....	62
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	89
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS.....	124
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS.....	150
APPENDIX	
A. PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY QUESTIONS .....	217
B. POST-COURSE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	221

C	REFLECTION QUESTIONS .....	223
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	225

## **ABSTRACT**

### **IMPLEMENTING AN ONLINE ORIENTATION COURSE TO PREPARE MASTER'S STUDENTS OF UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY FOR ACADEMIC WRITING**

by  
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United Theological Seminary, 2025

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United Theological Seminary, a United Methodist school for ministerial education and formation, upholds high academic standards for master's students. Nevertheless, many students struggle to achieve these standards in their academic writing. This project was created as an orientation course for new and in-coming students involving a series of short video lectures covering writing fundamentals such as preparing a thesis, Turabian-style formatting, quotations, and formulating coherent paragraphs that are pertinent to one's topic. Collected data indicated that students who took this online course developed a knowledge of seminary-level writing expectations, having been provided with a foundation to write high-quality academic papers.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I want to express my appreciation to our living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's brought me farther than I ever could have imagined. Bringing me to United Theological Seminary has been such a gift to my life, and providing me with the opportunity to earn a Doctor of Ministry is proof of his goodness. Dr. Justus Hunter, Dr. David Watson, and Bishop Emeritus Michael Lowry, have poured so much into me and I'm grateful for the formation I've received through them and the "Living the Historic Faith" cohort. I can't begin to express my gratitude for such amazing people.

Additionally, my professional associates deserve recognition for their time and guidance during this process: Dr. Scott Kisker, Dr. Jonathan Hanover, and Dr. Leslie Tomlinson, thank you. Also, for the staff and faculty of United Theological Seminary, with special recognition to Ken Cochrane, Mark Condry, and Frederick Osei-Manu, and my church family at Union City GMC. I could not have made it this far without their help.

For my family: my dad, Kelly Mallory Sr., who instilled in me the virtues of hard work and dedication. I am grateful for him and these gifts he has brought to my life. My kids, who have been an enormous source of joy and inspiration. And lastly, for my wife, Rev. Dr. Tesia Lee Mallory. I could not have done any of this without her. Her wisdom, intelligence, beauty, talent, and love are among the things I am most grateful for in life.

God has blessed me with such an amazing woman of God to be my wife. From the bottom of my heart, and with all my soul, thank you.

## **DEDICATION**

This entire project is dedicated to my sons, Julian Wesley, and Leland James. It's my greatest honor in life to watch these young men grow into strong, competent, capable, intelligent, and loving men of God. Their potential is boundless, and with great faith and self-confidence, they will accomplish everything they set out to do. My prayer for them is that they will never forget their worth in the eyes of God, and may he lead them to leave a lasting and meaningful impact on the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

Julian and Leland, you are my greatest inspiration. May this work be a testament to what you can do through great faith and perseverance. There is nothing that you can't do.



## ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figures

1	Figure 1 .....	166
2	Figure 2 .....	166
3	Figure 3 .....	167
4	Figure 4 .....	168
5	Figure 5 .....	168
6	Figure 6 .....	169
7	Figure 7 .....	170
8	Figure 8 .....	171
9	Figure 9 .....	171
10	Figure 10 .....	172
11	Figure 11 .....	173
12	Figure 12 .....	174
13	Figure 13 .....	175
14	Figure 14 .....	176
15	Figure 15 .....	177
16	Figure 16 .....	178
17	Figure 17 .....	179
18	Figure 18 .....	181

19	Figure 19 .....	183
20	Figure 20 .....	183
21	Figure 21 .....	184
22	Figure 22 .....	186
23	Figure 23 .....	186
24	Figure 24 .....	187
25	Figure 25 .....	188
26	Figure 26 .....	189
27	Figure 27 .....	190
28	Figure 28 .....	191
29	Figure 29 .....	192
30	Figure 30 .....	193
31	Figure 31 .....	194

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
APA	American Psychological Association
CMS	Chicago Manual of Style
DMin	Doctor of Ministry
MA	Master of Arts
MACM	Master of Arts in Christian Ministries
MDiv	Master of Divinity
MLA	Modern Language Association
MM	Master of Ministry
MTS	Master of Theological Studies
TH500	The Craft of Theological Thinking, Reading, and Writing
ThD	Doctor of Theology
United	United Theological Seminary

If you should ask how these things come about, question grace, not instruction; desire, not intellect; the cry of prayer, not pursuit of study; the spouse, not the teacher; God, not man; darkness, not clarity; not light, but the wholly flaming fire which will bear you aloft to God with fullest unction and burning affection. This fire is God, and the furnace of this fire leadeth to Jerusalem; and Christ the man kindles it in the fervor of His burning Passion...

—St. Bonaventure, *The Mind's Road to God*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The mission statement of United Theological Seminary (United) is “to prepare faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” Many ministers, and future ministers, coming from all walks of life, attend United to be formed in ministerial education and enriched through this promise the school makes to its students. However, there are several students each year who have been accepted into their respective master’s programs but do not have the knowledge or tools to write high-quality academic papers that meet the standards of higher education degrees. Lacking these necessary skills to achieve well inevitably leads to frustration with their seminary performance and may cause them to question their call into ministry altogether.

With United’s mission to “prepare” its students, after accepting them into their programs, it is suitable that the school provide them with the proper means to attain success in their education. For this reason, the course, “TH500” or “The Craft of Theological Thinking, Reading, and Writing,” was implemented to provide students with the skills and understanding to improve the quality of their work. This class, however, is only offered once a year. As a result, some students find this assistance too late into their degrees, or sometimes not at all. The Writing Center was also created to assist students throughout the academic year and though proven to be helpful, there are still students who are either unaware that this resource is available to them or are hesitant to seek such support.

Though it is ultimately the student's own responsibility to improve his or her own work, it cannot yet be stated that United has done all in its power to help those who are struggling. After all, many are unaware that their writing is inadequate until they are told so. To combat this problem, an orientation course to cover the basics of academic writing was developed to help students know the quality of effort that will be required from their assignments. This course placed a particular emphasis on the writing aspect of United's master's programs. The purpose of this project was to discern if such an orientation course would be advantageous to new and incoming students as a means to familiarize themselves with their forthcoming workload, while also gaining keen insights into their problem areas regarding writing.

The introductory class incorporated academic writing fundamentals including the following:

- Making an argument
- Writing a thesis statement
- Constructing a paragraph
- Correct paper formatting
- Quotes, plagiarism, and citations in the Turabian style (including bibliography and footnotes)

These topics were separated into a series of two to fifteen-minute videos for students to watch any time within their respective masters program. The course served as an orientation for those students who were new or incoming. However, the course was also made available to any student who wished to further his or her knowledge of academic writing.

The project, itself, was based on four foundational pillars: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and an Interdisciplinary focus on academic writing. Each foundation plays a critical role in the development of the structure of the project. The Biblical foundation was found in Genesis 45:4-8, which gives the course a scriptural underpinning that was used to help guide the heart of the project. Through this scripture, which uses the story of the patriarch, Joseph, to explain a theological reason behind times of test, trial, and growth, those who participated in the project were encouraged with the knowledge that God is with them in their distress and difficulty. Its goal was also to help students see that, ultimately, God will make good out of situations of trial. That includes work done in seminary, which can be stressful and tedious at times. Paper assignments are often difficult by design, but it is ultimately to grow students into well-informed and practiced ministers.

The second foundation covered the history of Methodist educational formation, particularly in the developing United States. This pillar shows that the Methodist tradition is one in which clergy education is highly valued. As many students at United are of the Methodist or Wesleyan tradition, becoming familiar with the roots of education within Methodism can help connect students to their rich history and provide them with a greater sense of purpose. Moreover, from a historical standpoint, higher education in Methodism was never about collecting knowledge. Rather, it was about growing in one's discipleship and one's Christian formation. For the sake of this project, this history is of great importance as it emboldens students as it is designed to help them see the spiritual benefits of seminary work.

Saint Bonaventure's theology of seeking higher knowledge is a crucial component to this project much in the same way as educational formation in Methodism and Joseph's story as found in Genesis. This makes up the third foundation, which is centered on a theological understanding. The three aforementioned foundations together could be inspirational for students to see their time in seminary as part of God's calling, as opposed to an obligation. Bonaventure's theology, however, stresses that to truly know a thing is to know God, as all things were made by, for, and through Christ. This indicates that the knowledge gained from seminary is primarily to help students grow in their love and knowledge of God. Because of this, paper writing not only assists students in their comprehension and articulation of a given subject, but also provides an exercise that results in students strengthening their knowledge of God. This very fact is a support for the project, as participants learned the basics of academic writing, and why they will be doing much of it throughout their seminary careers.

Finally, the discipline of academic writing is the linchpin of the project as this was the area on which participants were keenly focused. The project consisted of seven sessions, six of which highly utilized key aspects of academic writing. After all, the point of the project was to assist students in their grasp of academic writing so that they may be better prepared moving forward. This foundation, then, undergirds the project through its explanation of academic writing, thinking theologically, and how to research well.

In all, the four areas of study combine to create a solid foundation for the project. Beginning with the first lesson, participants were introduced to these foundations, and became familiar with the role they played in the course. It was also explained how the Biblical, Historical, and Theological applications impact their academic paper writing. In



the end, the purpose for utilizing these elements in this project was to show that paper writing is not simply for their own knowledge, but so that they may grow in their faith and knowledge of God.

To measure the merits of the project, students were asked to participate in pre-and post-course surveys, reflections, short homework assignments, and some were asked to interview to provide further data. In the final chapter, all information was collected, examined, and analyzed to determine the viability of such a course as a means to prepare students to enter seminary with a bedrock of information that meets the standards of academic writing expected by many of United's professors. The results and potential implications of the project, entitled, "Implementing an Online Orientation Course to Prepare Master's Students of United Theological Seminary for Academic Writing," are discussed in the final chapter.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

United's Writing Center is an extension of the school's O'Brien Library that was birthed from the desire of the school to provide assistance for those students who seem to be lacking in their abilities to write academic papers. The Writing Center, operated by the Writing Center Coordinator and a student writing tutor, serves to assist masters-level students in learning to write academically, theologically, reflectively, and pastorally.<sup>1</sup> Students who struggle with, or who would just prefer someone to look over, their writing are invited to contact the Writing Center for assistance, and are also encouraged to take advantage of the tools the Writing Center has to offer to help students write to their best ability.

Under my leadership as the Writing Center Coordinator, I took it as my responsibility to build upon the resources the Writing Center provides to help students with their research and paper-writing. Although students are responsible for their own work, accommodating tools to assist in their writing allows for writing anxieties and frustrations to be calmed, which can result in better papers being produced. As better papers are being produced by students, the students are able to grasp a deeper and more

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<sup>1</sup> "Writing Center," United Theological Seminary, last modified July 21, 2021, <https://online.united.edu/courses/698/pages/writing-center>.

robust understanding of the topic about which they are writing, helping in their formation as professional Christian ministers.

As this chapter explores the ministry of United's Writing Center and how it intersects with my God-given skills and interests, it will also highlight what the Writing Center currently offers as resources, as well as the areas of concern I see in many of the students who come to the Writing Center seeking help. Several students take advantage of the ways in which the Writing Center can help them as they write their papers. Despite the resources given, there are still some students who reach out to the Writing Center for help who have significant writing needs that go beyond simple spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes. Difficulties of this degree can be the result of many different factors, however, a number of students are just not prepared to devote the time and energy required to meet the academic excellence United sets as its standard, as they have not been informed of the importance and intricacies of writing academic research papers. If United's incoming students were offered a preliminary course regarding academic writing, likely during their orientation, many would come into seminary with at least a basic understanding of the kind of work that United expects from its students, lessening their stress, and ultimately creating higher-quality work.

### **Context**

As a United Methodist theological institution, United is committed to the historic faith, scriptural holiness, and church renewal.<sup>2</sup> In keeping with its commitments, United

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<sup>2</sup> "List of Approved Seminaries," General Board of Higher Education, The United Methodist Church, last modified April 12, 2021, <https://www.gbhem.org/students/seminary/list-of-approved->

provides an array of theological and ministerial degrees to help students become more knowledgeable in their faith and practice. United offers five Masters degrees. These degrees include a Master of Divinity (MDiv), Master of Theological Studies (MTS), Master of Ministry (MM), Master of Arts in Christian Ministry (MACM), and a Master of Arts (MA) degree.<sup>3</sup> For those looking to further their practical education in ministry, United also offers a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program, helping ministry students to become doctors of the church.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a Doctor of Theology (ThD) degree was added recently.

Founded as a school of the United Brethren in Christ in 1871, United has a mission to prepare “faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Staying true to its core commitments as well as its mission, United seeks to be an institution of higher learning with a standard of academic excellence, while at the same time taking the role and responsibility of Christian religious education seriously.

As United offers its services to many students around the world, each student comes with his or her own set of expectations and experiences. United’s students come from a variety of different educational and vocational environments, ages, ethnicities, nationalities, and socio-economic backgrounds. Those who receive the call to ministry can come from any walk of life. As a result, there is a need for incoming students to be

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seminaries/; United Theological Seminary, last modified December 7, 2021, <https://www.albright.edu/about-albright/collegehistory/>.

<sup>3</sup> Scott Kisker, “Masters Degrees,” United Theological Seminary Virtual Open House, United Theological Seminary, last modified August 27, 2021, <https://united.edu/virtual-open-house/>.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Hudson, “Doctoral Program,” United Theological Seminary Virtual Open House, United Theological Seminary, last modified August 27, 2021, <https://united.edu/virtual-open-house/>.

<sup>5</sup> “Center for the Evangelical United Brethren Heritage,” United Theological Seminary, last modified October 13, 2021. <https://united.edu/center-for-the-evangelical-united-brethren-heritage-eub/>; <https://united.edu/>.

well-informed about United's academic standards as an institution of higher learning, but at the same time, there is also a duty on United's behalf, in its mission to prepare faithful and fruitful Christian leaders, to help equip those who may struggle to meet those standards. It is for this reason that United's Writing Center was developed and implemented.

Considering the 150+ years of theological education provided by United Theological Seminary, the school's Writing Center is relatively new, and serves the student population as a resource for those who require assistance with their academic writing endeavors. With students coming from all over the world, from different languages, social upbringings, differing needs, educational backgrounds, ages, and socio-economic conditions, the Writing Center has become an invaluable commodity, as many of these factors play a part in one's expectations of one's seminary experience. Many of United's students, particularly those in a master's program, have relied on the help the Writing Center has provided. With these factors and more in play, the Writing Center has proven to be a crucial asset, as well as a successful ministry for the seminary.

### **The Writing Center as a Ministry**

Learning to write effectively is a critical component of any seminary education. As United's mission is to prepare faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ, a large piece of that preparation is found in learning to think theologically. Learning to think theologically requires a student to consider concepts of the faith in ways that they may have never considered before. In his book, *Thinking Theologically*, Ronald J. Allen notes that the word *theology* is derived from two Greek

words: *theos*, which translates to “God,” and *logos*, which Allen translates as “to think about.” Theology, then, is simply “thinking about God.” Allen points out that to a degree, all Christians have practiced theology as each Christian has thoughts concerning God. However, most Christians have what is called “embedded theology.” Allen explains, “...most Christians have an... approach to theological beliefs and issues that they take for granted,” some of which, “... (are) intuitive and never (rise) to the level of explicit awareness.”<sup>6</sup> All Christians, then, knowingly or unknowingly, apply their preconceived notions to their faith. Allen argues that Christians, particularly preachers, should be aware of these assumptions and preconceptions, and understand how these ideas might interfere with or play into the preaching and the lives of the congregation. The professor states, “The preacher’s theological ideas further shape how the preacher understands the congregation as a listening community, and what the preacher regards as the goal of the sermon.”<sup>7</sup> With this in mind, the pastor, preacher, teacher, or Christian interlocutor, must know from where his or her theological beliefs stem, and must also have an understanding of differing theologies, in order to teach from the Christian faith in a well-rounded manner. In other words, if one wishes to express one’s thoughts concerning theological topics, this is best done once one learns to think theologically.

Thinking theologically, however, does not necessarily come easily to everyone. Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, in their book, *How to Think Theologically*, submit that theological thinking “...involves working with various materials or resources, applying certain skills which can be learned and honed over time by concentration and

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<sup>6</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *Thinking Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Allen, *Thinking*, 6.

practice.”<sup>8</sup> To think theologically, then, requires one’s careful consideration, intentionality, and conscientiousness in order to go beyond one’s embedded theology to reach what Stone and Duke call *deliberative theology*. Deliberative Theology is “the understanding of faith that emerges from a process of carefully reflecting upon embedded theological convictions.”<sup>9</sup> One academic goal for the seminary student is to understand one’s embedded theology, and to move toward a deliberative theology; one that is carefully considered and can expand upon, and even sometimes challenge, one’s embedded theology. Duke and Stone write, “The theologian wants to take all the testimony and evidence under advisement, press beneath the surface to the heart of the matter, and develop an understanding of the issue that seems capable—at least for the present—of withstanding any further appeal.”<sup>10</sup> In order to write well as a student of ministry, one must first know how to think theologically so that one can consider his or her topic from many different points of view, and continue digging to go beyond a surface-level understanding. Having said that, learning to think theologically takes practice, and in a circular way, practicing theological thinking is best done through research and writing.

For the purposes of learning to think theologically, academic reading, writing, and research are of great value for the seminary student. Though many students struggle with the idea of there being a purpose behind their research and writing, there is, in actuality, much for the student to gain. Authors Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain

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<sup>8</sup> Howard W. Stone, and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 17.

Robertson say in their book, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*, “Writing a research paper could teach you far more than a teacher could. On the topic of a research paper, you become an expert, sometimes knowing more about it than the professor who assigned the paper. Besides, when you learn by doing, you learn better.”<sup>11</sup> The authors indicate that in addition to learning more about a particular topic through the process of researching and writing, the student benefits in many other ways as well, such as enhancing the student’s critical thinking skills, as well as his or her development of character. The writers state, “When the going is hard and the task becomes drudgery, sticking with the work is a discipline that enhances the worth of any student.”<sup>12</sup> Through perseverance, the student cultivates grit and mastery over the work accomplished, proving the student’s effectiveness on a professional level.

To stay true to its mission, United, as a theological institution of ministry, seeks to help form their students in their professional and spiritual development. For this reason, reading, research, and academic paper writing are used in many of the courses at United. Given that there are a number of students who come to seminary for this formation, yet are unprepared for the work that is required, United’s Writing Center exists as a commitment to those individuals who are called by God to deepen their understanding of the faith yet have difficulty when it comes to writing the academic papers which have the potential to advance students in their theological thinking in considerable ways.

As much as the Writing Center is a commitment from the seminary to the students, it is also a ministry. The Writing Center provides services for students to help in

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<sup>11</sup> Nancy Jean Vyhmesiter and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Vyhmeister and Robertson, *Papers*, 24.



any area of concern when it comes to writing papers. Having grown up with what was initially diagnosed to be attention deficit disorder (ADD), later, being correctly diagnosed with slow processing, along with a history of low self-esteem and low self-confidence, I understand how difficult the struggle can be for a student to keep up with the requirements of writing assignments. I also understand the importance of the guidance and resources schools provide like the Writing Center. Having someone available to help show where one can improve in certain aspects can be a gift, and that is certainly true when it comes to writing well. Therefore, the way I understand my role as the Writing Center Coordinator is more than a title or job description; it is my God-given calling, and it is a ministry that I take personally.

### **Skills**

The experiences I have faced in my years of schooling have qualified me for my ministry as United's Writing Center Coordinator. Growing up, I had many factors working against me that contributed to my struggling to retain decent grades in my schoolwork. This led to many years of shame and frustration as I could not understand why I was not able to keep up with my peers. Eventually, in the seventh grade, I was misdiagnosed with ADD, which at least gave me some kind of answer for my lack of focus. I would eventually be correctly diagnosed with slow processing much later in life. However, in my younger years, I also had a homelife that was not a conducive learning environment. I came from a broken home, as my mother had abandoned the family when I was only four years old. My father raised my siblings and myself, but when he eventually remarried, he married a woman who was abusive to my siblings and me. The

abuse I encountered as a child induced personal feelings of low self-esteem and low self-confidence. In addition to an abusive habitat, I also received very little help from my father and stepmother when it came to my school assignments. My father was usually busy with work, while my stepmother simply did not seem to care. Eventually, I got to a place where I just accepted that I was not a good student and that I never would be. I believed there was something inherently wrong with me that would keep me from ever measuring up to my peers. With low expectations for myself, I did the bare minimum to get by in my schoolwork, though I did somehow manage to pass each grade.

It took years and the right people speaking into my life, but over time, I began to realize the importance of personal responsibility. As I was going through my undergrad studies, with a renewed interest in personal responsibility, my eyes were opened to my sense of purpose, and through a sense of purpose, I also began seeing my potential as a student. My desire was to work in ministry as well as academics, somehow merging these two worlds. This sense of purpose carried on throughout seminary, where I would graduate with a 3.9 grade point average; something I never could have seen myself accomplishing in my younger years.

My love for my schoolwork, both as an undergrad and as a seminary student, in addition to my sense of purpose, contributed to my desire to work as a teacher's assistant for several professors at United. This helped me to sharpen my skills in many ways. I was able to look over and grade student discussions in their online interactions, and I was also reading their papers and offering some feedback. Additionally, I assisted some professors as they worked on books they were authoring or compiling. Assisting in these ways primed me significantly as I prepared to become an academic. I was also seeking out

publishing opportunities and ended up writing two book reviews for the journal, “Reviews in Religion and Theology.”

Having the experience of writing, formatting, editing, and proofreading qualified me for the Writing Center Coordinator position that opened up at United shortly after I graduated. Just as important, my history of struggle with my schoolwork also plays a unique role in my ministry. Because of the challenges I faced, including my slow processing diagnosis, when I am approached by a student who is having difficulties with his or her writing assignments, I am able to view the situation with a sense of empathy. I can understand how difficult it can be, while I also know the importance of getting work completed. This can be quite advantageous in earning a student’s trust, helping the student to put their guard down, knowing that he or she will not be met with poor judgment or chastisement. The Writing Center can become a sort of haven where an individual can have his or her writing needs met with no castigation. In general, students may find it stressful to speak of their writing concerns with those in certain positions of authority over them. According to an article by professor emeritus of English and Director of the Writing Lab at Purdue University, Muriel Harris,

... it is stressful for them [students] to talk about their writing with someone whom they perceive as having some institutional authority over them. Such students view themselves as being treated as inferiors, talked down to, demeaned in some way when talking with teachers, but not with tutors. The collaborative atmosphere of the tutorial, the sense of being with someone who does not assume any authoritative posture, seems to relieve that strain or eliminate the fear.<sup>13</sup>

In Harris’ understanding, students tend to be much more relaxed and open to receiving help when they view their tutor as more of a peer than an instructor. Coming from a place

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<sup>13</sup> Muriel Harris, “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors,” *College English* 57, no. 1 (January 1995): 36, <https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.2307/378348>.

of empathy allows the student to know that he or she is not alone in his or her struggles and anxieties, and that through collaboration, the tutor can provide proper guidance to get the student on track to writing high-quality work.

In all, my hard work, experiences, and natural personality have conglomerated to qualify me for the ministry I have before me. My gifts and skills are appropriately placed in the Writing Center at United, to help the school meet its mission to prepare faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ. As one who understands the needs, struggles, and insecurities, as well as the responsibilities that students meet in their schoolwork, it is an important role in my life to help individuals see their purpose and their capability, and how those enmesh with their calling.

### **Needs of the Writing Center**

In the academic year of 2020-2021, the Writing Center, in its first fully functioning year, was able to assist with 38 student writing inquiries. For the academic year of 2021-2022, the Writing Center provided assistance for 54 student writing inquiries. This growth indicates that students are not only being provided with significant help with their paper-writing, but it also shows the increasing value of the Writing Center as a resource for students. United's students, who come from all walks of life and from all over the world, are able to find success in their academic writing by the services provided by the Writing Center.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, with an increasing number of students seeking help from the Writing Center, the question is raised, what tools are

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<sup>14</sup> "At a Glance," United Theological Seminary, last modified November 30, 2020, <https://united.edu/ata glance2021/>.

students lacking that they would feel the need to contact the Writing Center in the first place? There are multiple ways in which students may not be prepared for masters-level work. Surely the Writing Center sees its share of easily correctable spelling mistakes, grammar errors, and formatting issues. However, there are those who do require a significant amount of attention when it comes to their academic writing. Some, for instance, may have a learning disability like dyslexia, or ADD, that keeps them from fully engaging in their assigned work. Students who have to manage learning disabilities sometimes require the resources offered by the Writing Center to help keep them on track with their educational goals. Another example of those who rely on the Writing Center are some of United's international students who may be facing a language barrier, both spoken as well as the culturally expected academic standards in the United States of America. Still, there are other students at United who never learned how to write a proper academic paper. The call to ministry can happen to anyone, no matter their educational background. As a result, United might receive students who come to seminary prepared, having majored in an undergraduate program that required a fair amount of academic writing, like philosophy or religion, while others may have come from an accounting or engineering background that placed an emphasis on mathematics. Many of those who did not receive a Liberal Arts degree might find themselves less-than-ready for the amount of high-quality writing that a seminary education requires. The same can be said for those who have been out of school for several years.

Yet another example is that, as a theological institution for ministry, many of United's students are already serving in congregations in some sort of preaching role and have therefore grown accustomed to their own style of homiletical writing. In such cases,

the student will have to make some changes to their style of writing, now reflecting an academic setting, rather than a congregational one. This problem is significant enough that Vyhmeister and Robertson thought it would be wise to bring it up in their book, *Quality Research Papers*: "...research is not a sermon. It is different in content, style, and language.... A sermon becomes effective through the delivery, whereas in research writing, there is no dramatic rendition from the pulpit. What appears on paper must stand, just as it is written, without any further embellishment."<sup>15</sup> Understanding the difference between these styles of writing is imperative for the minister to succeed in seminary.

One other problem the students who visit the Writing Center face is that many of them simply do not see the purpose of their writing. Some people come to seminary, not because they feel called to attend by God, but because they see it as one of many hoops to jump through in order to get to where they believe God has called them to be. This lack of understanding of one's purpose can create a barrier of indifference in which one might do the bare minimum to get by, rather than opening oneself up to what God might be preparing for them in the present. If indifference is the primary obstacle for students and their paper-writing, then the needs of the student go beyond the help the Writing Center can provide. However, because the Writing Center utilizes encouragement to motivate students, it can be perfectly acceptable to help a student to see their time at seminary as one step, or a piece of God's calling, rather than the end goal being the sole calling.

One final issue to be mentioned here is the problem that United's remedial writing course, "The Craft of Theological Thinking, Reading, and Writing," or "TH500," is only offered during the Fall term. This puts struggling students at a disadvantage. For instance,

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<sup>15</sup> Vyhmeister and Robertson, *Papers*, 23.

if a student enters his or her first term during the fall and finds that he or she has trouble with the writing assignments offered by the classes, the student will have to wrestle through two more terms without the guidance and preparation that TH500 can provide when it comes to writing academic papers. By the time the student is finished with the course, it is possible he or she could be over half-way through his or her degree program. The Writing Center is certainly available to assist students in such a circumstance. However, having immediate access to a class that is specifically dedicated to helping students with their writing and theological thinking would be more advantageous and desirable in order to get the most out of their time at United Theological Seminary.

United's Writing Center is not designed to solve all the problems that come between a student and the student's writing. Ultimately, that is something that only the student can do for his or her own self. The Writing Center can only serve simply to provide assistance to those who seek out help for their writing. There is, however, something to be said for a student coming into seminary, who is ill-prepared for the quantity and quality of academic writing that masters-level classes demand. Students who are properly prepared and know what to expect from seminary would have the significant advantage of having less stress and anxiety surrounding the amount of work and writing excellence that United holds as its academic standard. The question then becomes, how can the Writing Center bridge the gap between students who are not prepared for graduate-level work, and their courses that require more from them than they are ready to give? Personal responsibility is always a key component when it comes to one's education, but United's incoming students may not always understand what is expected of them as they enter into seminary. According to United's mission statement, however,

the school takes the responsibility of assuring they prepare their students. The Writing Center could be an essential factor in this preparation, helping students to know the quality and quantity of work that is expected for them to earn a master's degree while meeting United's academic standards.

### **Doctor of Ministry Project**

As a ministry to the student body of United Theological Seminary, the Writing Center plays an important role to help the school reach its mission to prepare faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ. "To prepare" is central to the mission. According to the mission statement, if students come to seminary unprepared, it is United's responsibility to prepare them. What is being noticed in the Writing Center is that many students are not prepared for the work that will equip them as they follow the great commission, faithfully and fruitfully, to the best of their ability. They simply lack the knowledge, experience, and theological thinking to write high-quality, masters-level, academic work. The Writing Center, however, can provide students with practical approaches in order to prepare them for the academic excellence United requires.

As the Writing Center Coordinator, I propose a set of tutorials as an orientation for students of United composed of video sessions that teach the fundamentals of academic writing. My hypothesis is that if students participate in the writing curriculum, they will be better prepared to write master's-level work. Having greater knowledge will reflect in greater confidence, and having confidence in their ability to write academically will result in better performance, overall.



As the Writing Center Coordinator, I created content that served as a form of orientation for incoming students to complete, but was also made available for all students who might benefit from the course. The videos were composed of several rudimentary paper-writing tutorials covering the essential information needed to write a proper masters-level paper. Topics included:

1. Why students write papers in seminary
2. Thinking theologically
3. Crafting a thesis statement
4. The introduction, body, and conclusion of a paper
5. The different types of writing, with a focus on research and exegesis papers, utilizing Dr. Scott Kisker's "Temple" illustration for writing research papers
6. General formatting and the use of the Turabian style
7. Resources for students to use: *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (9<sup>th</sup> edition), by Kate L. Turabian; *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (4<sup>th</sup> edition), by Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson; and *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), by Michael Gorman

Having this basic knowledge of writing academic papers will ensure that all incoming students at United will be entering into seminary aware of United's expectations for academic writing. It is on the student to take personal responsibility for how he or she carries this information, but at the very least, through this course, United set the stage for expectation while offering fundamental writing instruction that can aid in the student's preparation for seminary.

Though these resources were used during online orientation for incoming students, these videos will also be available on the Writing Center's Canvas page, allowing all students access to these valuable tools that anyone who is having trouble with their writing can find helpful. It can also be useful for some of United's professors who may want to show these tutorials in their class. Therefore, the online tutorials could be advantageous to anyone at United, whether it is a student who is beginning his or her program, a student who is finishing his or her degree, or a professor who wants to assist students in their writing. Opening access to these videos will provide a sense of preparedness, but will also provide ongoing assistance that can be of service throughout several terms.

### **Conclusion**

At my baptism, I was claimed by God and was given a calling. Having been baptized at 6 months, I was unaware of what God had in mind for my future. However, the path to where I am today was carved out for me along the way, and I am right where I thought I would be once I began to see my purpose: one foot in the pulpit, while the other in academics. Though my job at United's Writing Center is within the field of academics, I take it as a ministry. My ministry is directed toward ministers in the making, who are learning to think theologically, receiving a higher-education degree in order that they may broaden their hearts and minds as they are being prepared to become better servants of Jesus Christ. These students who seek help from the Writing Center for their writing assignments are being formed in their calling, and ultimately, this is United's goal as a Christian institution of higher learning. As the Writing Center Coordinator, it is my job to

assist students in getting the most they can out of their education through the papers they write. Because many students have trouble with their writing assignments, they will miss out on much of the preparation and formation United promises them as students of ministry.

The difficulties students might face are numerous. Students, in the end, are responsible for themselves and for their own schoolwork, and this is an idea the Writing Center takes as necessary in order for the student to succeed. Nevertheless, it is imperative that United, who accepts students from many different backgrounds and walks of life, with different disabilities and cultural expectations, meets students where they are, and works with those who may not be prepared for what is required of masters-level work. Many simply do not know what to expect out of their program of higher education and their courses.

The Writing Center at United has the explicit purpose of helping students excel in their writing. As a theological institution of higher learning, United's standard of academic excellence creates an environment for students to be educationally and spiritually formed to fulfill their mission to prepare faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The Writing Center helps to assure United is reaching its mission by making sure those students who struggle with their academic writing are given every opportunity to improve their work. When students have the tools needed to succeed, they can enjoy the fruits of United's mission to a fuller extent, as they are formed by the school's curriculum.

The Writing Center can provide such tools and resources to incoming students. By implementing some tutorials that indicate the sort of work that will be required,

United can give the basics of how to write, format, and cite their papers properly, as well as show the importance of thinking theologically. This allows for incoming students to have an expectation, and will be less likely to feel stressed or overwhelmed when it comes time to begin writing their assignments. Furthermore, through this project, it is possible for United's students to be given access to these tutorial videos through the Writing Center page in Canvas. This means that they would be able to revisit these tutorials any time they might feel stuck or lost in their work. Overall, these tutorials can be quite beneficial both for the preparation of students who are entering seminary, and those who are already going through their program, as they can become useful resources at their disposal.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”<sup>1</sup>

—Genesis 45:4-8

### **Introduction**

Many masters’ degree-seeking students at United Theological Seminary who come through the Writing Center are not informed and are ill-prepared for the quality of writing expected in academia. Along with this lack of preparedness is often also a lack of purpose. Some of these students do not understand why they must go through seminary to reach their end goal of becoming ministers of the church.

However, stories and situations of purpose and preparation are littered throughout the Bible. In fact, in view of the entire metanarrative of scripture, from the story of the fall of humanity onward, one can see a process of redemption throughout, ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture verses are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless stated otherwise.

ending with God reigning over heaven and earth. Through it all, God's purpose is declared, and as his body, the church is called to prepare for this moment. John Wesley once wrote,

I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*.<sup>2</sup>

Herein, Wesley illustrated the importance of understanding scripture's formational qualities. Wesley believed that God has given the Bible to the world as a witness to the way of Jesus Christ, which humanity is to follow. By living in obedience to "the Book of God," the Christian is living in obedience to the way of Jesus Christ. This is not a way that comes naturally to humanity, and therefore, it must be learned through the grace of God. Scripture then, as the Word of God, stands as a guide into the way of life in which the Christian is to live. The Bible exists to point the reader and hearer to Christ, and serves to prepare Christians for the work and ministry as the body of Christ. Preparation is a primary function of the Bible.

Several verses and stories highlight God's will for creation, and how people are often prepared for the purposes of God through unsuspecting means. The story of Joseph in the book of Genesis is an excellent example. Joseph's narrative is abounding in the titular character's times of success despite unforeseen (and sometimes miraculously foreseen) times of adversity. Through it all, however, scripture is clear to point out that even in Joseph's times of trial, he was successful because God was with him.

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<sup>2</sup> John Wesley, The Preface, "Sermons on Several Occasions," in Sermons I, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 1 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 105.

Joseph never wavered in his struggle, and he never denied the harsh realities of his struggle either. Yet it was his faith that God had a grander purpose for his trials that got him through. Several years after his brothers had sold him into slavery, a chance encounter put him face to face with those who had betrayed him. Now, having risen from slavery to a place of high honor and privilege, set to save the world through a great famine, the scripture says in Genesis 45:4-8,

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Joseph was able to let his brothers know that if they had not sold him into slavery, he would not be in his current position where he could save the line of Israel from the devastating effects of the seven-year famine. It was God who used Joseph's strife to prepare him for what was to come.

This pericope is about purpose, and it is about preparation. In the grander view of the story of Joseph, it can be seen that God's purpose is revealed through a process of preparation. Often, times of preparation can be trying and seemingly unfair, but in the end, God will bring glory through times of struggle. Seminary students sometimes feel as if their academic career serves no purpose other than being yet another complicated objective that stands in the way of reaching their goal to become ministers of the church. Rather than seeing this time as one of preparation, they become overburdened by what feels almost pedantic and unnecessary. Such students might find some relief and comfort

in Joseph's story. As God was with Joseph during his times of hardship, guiding and preparing him to restore hope for the nation of Israel, God will be with them too, guiding and preparing them to serve his church.

### **Contextual Analysis**

Joseph's story is the last to be told in the book of Genesis and finishes the line of Hebrew patriarchs that began with Abraham in chapter 12. From here, the book, in a narrative prose, chronicles the lives of the patriarchs, from Abraham to his son, Isaac, to his son, Jacob, and then to Jacob's sons, primarily focused on the life of Joseph. The purpose of these stories is to set up Israel as the nation of God's people and to provide an account for how they came to be. Joseph's story explains how all twelve tribes of Israel, or the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons, ended up in Egypt where the Hebrew people would be enslaved by the Egyptians.<sup>3</sup> To set up the context of Joseph's story, the outline below begins with the sons of Jacob visiting Egypt to find food in Genesis 42, and goes through the passage in question as found in Genesis 45. Finally, the outline ends after Genesis 46, which highlights the relocation of Joseph's brothers to the land in which Joseph had risen in authority and prominence.<sup>4</sup>

#### I. Genesis 42

- a. vv. 1-25, the brothers of Joseph in Egypt
  - i. vv. 1-5, Jacob sends the brothers to Egypt to buy grain
  - ii. v. 6, the brothers bow before Joseph
  - iii. vv. 7-8, Joseph recognizes his brothers
  - iv. vv. 9-16, Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Niditch, "Genesis," *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsome, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline L. Lapsley, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 32.

<sup>4</sup> An important note is that some scholars are hesitant to refer to this story as Joseph's. For example, an entire chapter within this section of Genesis is devoted to Judah. For more on this, see David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 263.



- v. v. 17, the brothers imprisoned for three days
  - vi. vv. 18-25, Joseph tests his brothers
    - 1. vv. 18-20, Joseph demands the brothers return to Canaan and come back to Egypt with Benjamin
    - 2. vv. 21-24a, the brothers bicker
    - 3. v. 24b, Simeon is bound and held captive
    - 4. v. 25, the brothers given provisions with their money
  - b. vv. 26-38, the brothers of Joseph return to Canaan
    - i. vv. 26-28, the brothers discover their money
    - ii. vv. 29-35, the brothers return to Jacob
    - iii. vv. 36-38, bereaved Jacob refuses to send Benjamin to Egypt
- II. Genesis 43
  - a. vv. 1-25, Joseph's brothers return to Egypt
    - i. vv. 1-2, Joseph's family runs out of food in Canaan
    - ii. vv. 3-7, Judah reminds Jacob that they must bring Benjamin
    - iii. vv. 8-10, Judah vows to protect Benjamin
    - iv. vv. 11-15, all the brothers sent back to Egypt with gifts
    - v. vv. 16-17, Joseph has a feast prepared for his brothers
    - vi. vv. 18-23, the brothers apologize to Joseph's steward for their "oversite."
    - vii. vv. 24-25, the brothers welcomed into Joseph's home
  - b. vv. 26-34, the brothers at Joseph's feast
    - i. v. 26, the brothers bow before Joseph again
    - ii. vv. 27-28, Joseph inquires about Jacob
    - iii. vv. 29-30, Joseph overcome with emotion when greeting Benjamin
    - iv. vv. 31-34, the brothers feast with Joseph
      - 1. v. 34, Benjamin given a quintuple portion
- III. Genesis 44
  - a. vv. 1-34, Benjamin detained
    - i. vv. 1-3, Joseph's brothers sent back to Canaan with provisions and Joseph's planted silver cup
    - ii. vv. 4-10, Joseph's steward sent to retrieve the cup and interrogate his brothers
    - iii. vv. 11-12, the cup found with Benjamin
    - iv. v. 13, the brothers return to the city in Egypt
    - v. vv. 14-17, Joseph interrogates his brothers
    - vi. vv. 18-34, Judah pleads for Benjamin's release
- IV. Genesis 45
  - a. vv. 1-15, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers
    - i. vv. 1-2, Joseph sends everyone besides his brothers away
    - ii. v. 3a, Joseph reveals himself as their brother
    - iii. v. 3b, the brothers dismayed
    - iv. vv. 4-8, the brothers' plot against Joseph revealed to work for God's plan to save the people of Israel
    - v. vv. 9-15, Joseph's plan to bring his family into Egypt
  - b. vv. 16-20, Pharaoh delights in Joseph's brothers

- c. vv. 21-28, the brothers sent back to Canaan to retrieve Jacob
  - i. vv. 21-24, the brothers given gifts to take with them to Canaan
  - ii. vv. 25-28, Jacob rejoices in the good news of Joseph's survival and prosperity
- V. Genesis 46
  - a. vv. 1-34, the whole family of Jacob relocates to Egypt
    - i. vv. 1-4, God encourages Jacob in a dream, and promises that he will become a great nation in Egypt
    - ii. vv. 5-27, Jacob's family of sixty-six in Canaan relocate to Egypt
    - iii. vv. 28-34, Joseph reunited with Jacob in Goshen

Some scholars argue that as a patriarchal narrative, Joseph's story is unique. In his book, *The Old Testament: A Literary History*, author Konrad Schmid indicates that what makes the Joseph story stand out among the other patriarchal narratives is that "it presents a story spanning fourteen biblical chapters rather than individual scenes in loose connection." He continues, "Unlike the patriarchal narratives in Genesis 12-36, we cannot assume that the Joseph narrative grew slowly from blocks of material to its present form. Instead, it seems to have been conceived from the beginning as a dramatic cycle and then redactionally attached to Genesis 12-36."<sup>5</sup> In this view, it is thought that Joseph's story once existed as a stand-alone narrative, of independent origin apart from the other patriarchal accounts. Scholar Thomas B. Dozeman agrees, saying in his book *The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah*, "The literary design and the central role of dreams reinforce the conclusion that the story of Joseph was an independent narrative before its insertion into its present context."<sup>6</sup> He cites several discrepancies within the story to support his claim. There are other scholars that do not fully agree, however. In the book, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament*, author Reinhard

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<sup>5</sup> Konrad Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 120-21.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 276.

G. Kratz explains that “Scholars reckon with an originally independent basic narrative which was put into the context of the patriarchal history and the history of the exodus at a secondary stage, and in the course of this was expanded in literary terms and assimilated.”<sup>7</sup> Yet, Kratz believes that there was never a point in which the story in question stood on its own. Rather, the story was once originally composed as a continuation of the patriarchal history, and later, the story was expanded to be a bridge from the patriarchs to the exodus.<sup>8</sup>

Because it was likely told as a part of oral tradition, the authorship of Joseph’s story is anonymous. Likewise, it is also difficult for scholars to pinpoint a range of dates in which it was finally written down. To know whether or not this story literally happened is another topic entirely, although many scholars believe it has its roots in historical events.<sup>9</sup> The so-called “period of the patriarchs” is estimated by some scholars to have taken place in the middle bronze age. Suggested dates for this period of time have varied between 2200 BCE and 1200 BCE.<sup>10</sup> The essay entitled “Archeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs,” by J. J. Bimson fixes an estimated date for Jacob’s family’s sojourn to Egypt roughly around 1877 BCE. Though he admits that his method of dating would not be accepted from a historical critical perspective, the scholar uses biblical

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<sup>7</sup> Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (New York: T & T Clark, 2000), 275.

<sup>8</sup> Kratz, *Composition*, 275-76.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis 16-50,” *Word Biblical Commentary* 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), xxxviii.

<sup>10</sup> Wenham, *Word*, xxi.

evidence including the ages of the patriarchs to determine the best possible date.<sup>11</sup>

However, Joseph's story speaks highly of Egypt, and thus, it may point to the time of the unified kingdom of Israel under the reign of Solomon.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, scripture indicates that the time of Solomon's reign was a relatively positive time for Israelite-Egyptian relations.<sup>13</sup> Some have argued that Joseph's story emerged as a *diaspora novella*; a story created with the intention to calm the anxieties of Israelites who have been forcefully relocated from their homeland. If this is the case, then Joseph's story would have been written sometime after the year 722 BCE and Joseph's character would stand as a symbol of one who, as a Hebrew, successfully made his home outside of Israel.<sup>14</sup> This would be centuries after the time of the unified kingdom of Israel under Solomon's reign. Yet, Dozeman states that the composition dating is hotly debated, noting, "The story about the northern ancestor Joseph in Egypt could reflect the exile of the Northern kingdom in the late-eighth century, or it may reflect the exile of the Southern kingdom in the sixth century or later."<sup>15</sup> Of course, Dozeman's dating assumes that Joseph's story is a *diaspora novella*. Beyond this wide range of possible dates of composition, it is difficult to find a more precise date as no rough drafts of the story exist, and textual criticism such as the "documentary hypothesis" is only theoretical and, particularly in the case of

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<sup>11</sup> J. J. Bimson, "Archeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, eds. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983) 86-87.

<sup>12</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," *The New Interpreter's Bible* 1, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 592.

<sup>13</sup> W. Lee Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 191.

<sup>14</sup> Safwat Marzouk, "Migration in the Joseph Narrative: Integration, Separation, and Transnationalism," *Hebrew Studies* 60 (2019), 71-72.

<sup>15</sup> Dozeman, *Pentateuch*, 277.

Joseph's story, is not helpful. This is especially the case since it is believed to have originally been its own story until it was eventually added to scripture. It is likely that the story developed and was embellished over time to become what is now an important part of the book of Genesis, and an overall essential connection from Genesis to Exodus.<sup>16</sup>

### **Biblical Passage Overview**

The story of Joseph is found in the book of Genesis, chapters 37-50. The narrative begins with Jacob, stating, "Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob."<sup>17</sup> This places Joseph in the land of Canaan, which will become much more important later in the story. It also indicates that this story is not Joseph's alone, but that of "the family of Jacob." Joseph, however, is the primary actor of the narrative. Joseph was the eleventh out of twelve sons to his father, Jacob. Being the first son of his favorite wife, Rachel, Joseph became Jacob's favorite son. In many ways, Joseph's character, though perhaps initially portrayed as arrogant, and certainly spoiled, is held to idealistic standards that is rarely seen in the book of Genesis. In his commentary on Genesis, John Skinner states, "Joseph is not... the embodiment of one particular virtue, but is conceived as an ideal character in all the relations in which he is placed: he is the ideal son, the ideal brother, the ideal servant, the ideal administrator."<sup>18</sup> This theme develops throughout the narrative, and ultimately leads into God's purpose for Joseph's life.

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<sup>16</sup> Cotter, "Genesis," 18.

<sup>17</sup> Gen. 37:1-2.

<sup>18</sup> John Skinner, "Genesis," *The International Critical Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 440.

In his love for Joseph, Jacob gifted his favorite son with a tunic he fashioned himself. It is worth noting that the mentioning of Joseph's decorated robe likely foreshadows his rise to prominence, eventually becoming second in authority only to Pharaoh.<sup>19</sup> Joseph's brothers were jealous of their father's special love he had for Joseph; however, their hatred had escalated when he recounted a dream he had had to them. In his dream, Joseph and his brothers were binding sheaves in a field, when his sheaf rose, and their sheaves bowed to his. The brothers believed that through this dream, Joseph intended to reign over them. In a second dream he recounted, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. After telling his father of this dream, Jacob responded, "What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, bow to the ground before you?"<sup>20</sup> His brothers grew in their anger toward him and began to plot his demise. At the heart of this sibling rivalry is the nature of the tribes of Israel, or "the sons of Jacob." In his book, *Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives*, author William McKane states, "The genealogical scheme is a way of representing tribal history and Jacob is the 'father' of the twelve tribes in virtue of his identification with Israel. It was congenial to the thought of ancient Israel to give expression to a sense of corporate identity by representing national structure in terms of family structure."<sup>21</sup> In other words, the purpose of equating the tribes of Israel as twelve sons is to indicate their cohesiveness as one people. The indication of different mothers

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<sup>19</sup> Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 75.

<sup>20</sup> Gen. 37:10b.

<sup>21</sup> William McKane, *Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1979), 68.

between these tribes, or “brothers,” points to “differences in status between tribes.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Joseph, as the first-born son of Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel, represents a favored status of his tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh.

One day, as the brothers were tending to their father’s flocks, Joseph came along to find them. While he was still off in the distance, the brothers said, “Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.”<sup>23</sup> However, Reuben, Jacob’s oldest son, advised against this. Wishing not to contradict his brothers’ desires to do away with him, Reuben suggested they fling him into the wilderness. Reuben then, in secret, would find Joseph and restore him back to their father. The text does not indicate why Reuben wished to spare his brother’s life; however, some scholars speculate that it may be due to his primary place in the birth order.<sup>24</sup> Whatever his reasoning, the brothers agreed, and when they saw Joseph coming, they stripped him of his ornamented tunic his father had given him, and they threw him into a pit. One way or another, they had to do away with him. In his commentary on Genesis, Walter Brueggemann points out that, “For Joseph, the future is a prospect to be celebrated, a promise to be kept. For the brothers, the future is a deathly threat. But it can be resisted! They resolve to stop it.”<sup>25</sup> If it so happens that Joseph’s dream comes to

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<sup>22</sup> McKane, *Studies*, 70-71.

<sup>23</sup> Gen. 37:18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Ron Pirson, *The Lord of the Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37-50* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 63.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 303.

fruition, they would face great embarrassment. However, if they act, they could hopefully squelch any possibility of having to bow before their brother.

With Joseph in the pit, the brothers spotted a caravan of Ishmaelites making their way toward Egypt. One brother, Judah, mentioned that instead of leaving Joseph to die in a pit, they should sell him to the Ishmaelites so they can profit off him. Agreeing to this, the brothers sold Joseph into slavery to Midianite travelers for 20 pieces of silver, and they took him with them to Egypt.<sup>26</sup> Slaughtering a goat, the brothers dipped Joseph's tunic into the blood and returned to their father. What was potentially a symbol of success, is now, from Jacob's point of view, the evidence of his son's downfall. Jacob recognized the robe as the one he had given to Joseph, and he tore his clothes in grief, believing his son had been devoured by a beast. Brueggemann notes that Jacob is inconsolable in his profound grief, but perhaps the unquenchable mourning is pointing to strong, symbolic realities. He states,

Is this only a boy lost to a family? Perhaps. But perhaps we also are grieving the loss of Israel from history. With deep knowing, the tradition has taken this scene of grief and refusal of comfort and made it the main metaphor for the death of Israel at the fall of Jerusalem. Israel is without a comforter (Lam. 1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21). And the answering poet begins the new history with the new speech: "Comfort, comfort my people" (Isa. 40:1). The story of this family is about mourning and comfort. Comfort will be given (Matt. 5:4). But the mourning is deep and long. The loss is real.... The dream can disappear. It is fragile and precarious.<sup>27</sup>

The assumed loss of Joseph is a sad reality that Jacob must now wrestle with. Joseph's dream, if anything, was a young heart full of potential, and what could be, has now

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<sup>26</sup> In his translation and commentary on Genesis, Robert Alter notes that the names "Ishmaelites" and "Midianites" are used interchangeably, referring to the same group of people from different time periods. Perhaps this hints at multiple authorships over time. Albert Outler, "Genesis," *The Hebrew Bible: The Five Books of Moses* 1 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019). 143.

<sup>27</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 306.



disintegrated. However, this loss is also coupled with the raising of new questions regarding God's promise to his grandfather, Abraham, that he will be the father of many nations. If Joseph can die, then so can the rest of Abraham's line—a reality the nation of Israel wrestles with throughout the Old Testament scriptures.

The reader, however, knows that Joseph is very much alive, and is now in Egypt. Here, Joseph had been sold to a man named Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Chapter 39, verse 2 says, "The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master." Because he saw that the Lord was with Joseph, and that all he would do would prosper, Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his house, and he was the overseer of everything that Potiphar owned. In this role, God continued to make Joseph prosper, thereby becoming the conduit for Potiphar to receive God's blessings. This would not last long. In Genesis 39:6b-20, it explains how Joseph's virtue was put to the test when his natural charm caught the eye of Potiphar's wife. She then attempted to seduce him saying, "Lie with me." In this way, Potiphar's wife is portrayed as "the stereotypical temptress, a duplicitous woman who is to be feared by all upstanding males.... She is a woman who has acted like a man motivated by lust."<sup>28</sup> Stunned, Joseph responded, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Commentator Robert Alter points out that "Joseph's protestation invokes the key terms

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<sup>28</sup> Christiana de Groot, "Genesis," *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clack Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 26.

‘house,’ ‘all,’ ‘hand’... reminding [the reader] of the total trust given him as a steward.”<sup>29</sup>

Joseph, again, is an exemplar of virtue and cannot fathom falling into the temptation of lying with his master’s wife. After all, Potiphar had been good to Joseph, and so had God. Despite this, Potiphar’s wife did not relent, and attempts at seducing him continued. One day, however, Joseph was working in his master’s house alone, when the woman grabbed his garment off of him, saying, “lie with me.” Joseph ran off, leaving his garment in Potiphar’s wife’s hands. She called out for the members of the household, and when they came, she told them that Joseph had come to sleep with her, but he ran away when she cried out for help. In Claus Westermann’s *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary*, he elaborates,

The narrator... has no need to say a word about the inner change that takes place in the mistress of the house. We say, “Her scorned love changes to hate.” But the narrator does not even say this. The change that takes place in her is realized in what she sees. Everything had begun with seeing. The wife had seen a handsome young man; now she sees his cloak; she realized that he had left it in her hand. “In my hand,” i.e., in Hebrew also “in my power.” She holds his fate in her hand.<sup>30</sup>

Now that she has “evidence” to support her lie concerning Joseph’s misdeeds, it seems this garment will lead to Joseph’s demise. Gathering her household to stand as witnesses to this contrived event, the wife addresses her husband who was sure to have Joseph arrested, or possibly even killed.<sup>31</sup>

Upon hearing this, Potiphar was enraged. The text glances over Joseph’s plea, any trial that would have taken place, and the length of his prison sentence. The information that the readers are given is that Potiphar had taken his servant, Joseph, to prison where

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<sup>29</sup> Alter, “Genesis,” *Bible*, 150.

<sup>30</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 66.

<sup>31</sup> Bill T. Arnold, “Commentary Part Two: Ancestral Narratives – Genesis 12–50,” in *Genesis*, 125-390 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 333. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511807404.006.

the king kept his prisoners. Yet again, despite finding himself in a less-than-ideal circumstance, God was with Joseph. Chapter 39, verse 21 says, “But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.” Finding favor in the chief jailer’s sight, Joseph was yet again placed in a high position of privilege, taking his circumstance into account. Given charge of overseeing all the prisoners in the jail, whatever Joseph would do, he would prosper because God was with him. In his commentary on Genesis, Bill T. Arnold explains, “The recurrence of ‘Yahweh was with Joseph’ signals that all is not lost. Indeed, the reader is hereby invited to compare Joseph’s circumstances now with those of his arrival in Potiphar’s house.... As Joseph prospered in Potiphar’s house, so he will prosper in the prison.”<sup>32</sup> Just as Potiphar had enjoyed God’s blessings through Joseph’s work, so too would the chief jailer.

Chapter 40 begins with the introduction of two of the king’s stewards: his chief baker and his cupbearer. Having offended the king, both were thrown into prison. They were placed into the same jailhouse as Joseph, and thus, were under his care. One night, both men had troubling dreams. Distraught as no one could interpret their dreams for them, Joseph volunteered to interpret, saying, “Do not all interpretations belong to God? Please, tell them to me.” The careful reader will understand that Joseph, being a Hebrew, likely does not share the same deity as these two, presumably, Egyptian men. Alter notes that in Egypt, dream interpretation was “regarded as a science, and formal instruction of dream interpretation was given to schools called ‘houses of life.’”<sup>33</sup> Joseph, however, believes this skill is designated to those whom God chooses. Having had powerful

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<sup>32</sup> Arnold, “Commentary,” *Genesis*, 333.

<sup>33</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 153-54.

dreams in the past, Joseph believes that he is the one whom God wants to choose in that moment. Pharaoh's cupbearer was the first to agree to sharing his dream with Joseph, recounting a vine with three branches that budded, then blossomed, then bore grapes. Holding Pharaoh's cup in one hand, and the grapes in the other, he crushed the grapes into Pharaoh's cup, and handed it to him. Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream saying, "... the three branches are three days; within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer." He then requested that when the cupbearer is restored to his position, he mentions his name to Pharaoh so that he may get out of the prison in which he had unjustly been confined.

Despite his prison sentence, as the text makes clear, God remains with Joseph and causes him to succeed in all he sets out to do. In the process, he blesses others. Among his blessings is this God-given gift to accurately interpret dreams. Dozeman says, "Dreams are the central form of revelation in the story of Joseph; their truth is confirmed in fulfillment. Joseph is the most significant character in the narrative because of his ability to have dreams and to interpret the dreams of others."<sup>34</sup> Earlier in the narrative, the driving factor of the story was the two dreams that Joseph had had. It seems as if Joseph has vivid dreams but does not quite understand them. At this point, that driving factor has shifted to Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. Some scholars have noted that this shift indicates a move from Joseph's "selfish and immature" adolescence to a more sensible and shrewd young adult.<sup>35</sup> At the moment, however, though he has some semblance of

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<sup>34</sup> Dozeman, *Pentateuch*, 276.

<sup>35</sup> Cotter, *Genesis*, 295.

authority, and even though God is with him, he is still in prison. Brueggemann says, “That ‘God is with Joseph’ does not mean private comfort. Rather, it claims that... the dream dreamed over Joseph will move according to God’s sovereign purposes.”<sup>36</sup> Even in prison, God will remain with Joseph. Joseph, staying faithful to God, will use this divinely ordained gift he’s been given, for better or worse.

After seeing that the cupbearer had received a promising report, the chief baker then recalled his dream to Joseph. In his dream, he had three cake baskets on his head. In the top basket, there were many baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating out of it. Joseph then interpreted, “the three baskets are three days; within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a pole; and the birds will eat the flesh from you.” Three days later, both dreams came to fruition. The cupbearer was restored to his position, and the chief baker had been hung on a pole to die. Unfortunately for Joseph, the cupbearer had forgotten to mention his name to Pharaoh as he had asked.

Genesis 41 begins two years after Joseph had interpreted the dreams of his fellow prisoners. The story opens with a focus on Pharaoh and a dream he had had. In this dream, he was standing by the Nile River, when seven sleek, fat cows, came out of the river and grazed in the grass. Then seven more cows, this time, ugly and thin, came out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. The ugly and thin cows proceeded to eat up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then, in another dream, Pharaoh purported there were seven ears of plump, full grain, growing on one stalk. Then seven ears, thin and blighted, sprouted after them. The thinner ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh sought out interpretations from all around Egypt, but no one

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<sup>36</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 323.

was able to provide a satisfactory interpretation for him. Then the cupbearer had remembered how Joseph had successfully interpreted his and the chief baker's dreams. Joseph was able to shave and change into clean clothes, and then he was brought before Pharaoh, who requested that Joseph interpret his dream. Giving credit to his Hebrew God, Joseph answered, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." Joseph listened as Pharaoh shared his dream. Joseph responded: "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do." He continued to explain that the seven plump cows are seven years, as are the seven good ears. Likewise, the seven lean, ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, just as the seven empty, blighted ears are. Those represent seven years of famine. In his commentary on Genesis, David W. Cotter points out that because this dream takes place on the bank of "the Nile that gives life to Egypt, it is no surprise that a dream about a future threat to the life of Egypt should take place there."<sup>37</sup> Joseph explained what God was about to do. First will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. After those seven years, there will be seven years of famine. All the excess of food Egypt had had will no longer be remembered because of the disastrous famine that will follow. He then explained that because Pharaoh had this dream twice, it means that it will happen, for it had been fixed by God. This might bring to memory the two dreams that Joseph had in which his brothers' sheaves, and their stars bowed to him. Joseph suggested to Pharaoh that he ought to select a man who is "discerning and wise," and set him over the land of Egypt.<sup>38</sup> Then he must appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the

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<sup>37</sup> Cotter, *Genesis*, 299.

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 41:33.

land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. They are to gather and store up grain under his authority for food in the cities. That food will serve as a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that is to come, so that no one will die from it.

Impressed by Joseph's ability to interpret his dream, but also impressed by Joseph's ability to plan so thoroughly, so quickly, so far ahead of time, Pharaoh appointed Joseph as overseer of all of Egypt. In verses 39-40 of chapter 41, Pharaoh says, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You will be over my house, and all my people will order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." Then, removing his signet ring from his hand, he put it on Joseph's, and arrayed him in fine and expensive clothes, placing a gold chain around his neck. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him a wife. And at the age of 30, Joseph gained authority over the entire land of Egypt. In a monograph written by George W. Coats, "From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story," the author writes, "... Joseph's ability as a counselor and administrator functions as the primary reason for the Pharaoh's decision to elevate him to a position of power."<sup>39</sup> Joseph's foresight and quick ability to plan so thoroughly, along with his experience of ordering Potiphar's house as well as the jailhouse, was the proof that he met the "wise

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<sup>39</sup> George W. Coats, "From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series* 4 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), 27.

and discerning” qualifications needed to fulfill the role. Even Pharaoh could see that God was with Joseph.<sup>40</sup>

Just as Joseph had interpreted for Pharaoh, seven years of plenty came and went, but under his leadership, Egypt saved one-fifth of their excess in preparation for the famine that was to come. When the famine did arrive, Egypt had more than enough food saved. Nations from all over the region came to find food in Egypt because of Joseph’s ability to plan ahead. Gordon J. Wenham, in his commentary on Genesis mentions that the seven years of plenty also showed fruit in Joseph’s life, saying, “The birth of his children, and good crops are always seen as marks of divine blessing in the [Old Testament].”<sup>41</sup> The repeated pattern of Joseph’s blessings shows the reader that through Joseph, God blesses others. In his commentary on the Pentateuch, author Terence E. Fretheim explains, “The contributions of Joseph to [the Egyptians’] well-being are considerable. Blessings come to these people through his political acumen and economic savvy; indeed, the entire world comes into view, as all peoples receive benefits from his wisdom.”<sup>42</sup> This “wisdom,” “acumen,” and “economic savvy” is seen with Potiphar and his house, and this was seen in the jailhouse too. In his new position as governor of Egypt, the fruit of Joseph’s blessings was also being witnessed and shared with not only Pharaoh, and not only all of Egypt, but the surrounding region as well.

As Genesis 42 opens, the focus of the events is taken from Egypt to Canaan, where Joseph’s Father, Jacob, and his eleven brothers are enduring the famine. Jacob

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<sup>40</sup> Gen. 41:39-40.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis 16-50,” *Word Biblical Commentary* 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 397.

<sup>42</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 94.



knows of the excessive grain in Egypt and he sends his sons there, ten of Joseph's brothers, to purchase grain to bring back to their home. They had left their youngest brother, Benjamin, behind with their aging father, who was unwilling to allow Benjamin to be placed in harm's way. As Joseph was thought to be dead, Benjamin, the only remaining son of Rachel, and the youngest son of Jacob became the favorite, and Jacob did not want to put him at risk.<sup>43</sup> However, when his brothers arrived at Egypt in search of food, they unknowingly found themselves before Joseph. Joseph, on the other hand, immediately recognized his brothers, even though they did not recognize him. Seeing his brothers at his mercy as they bowed before him, he was reminded of the dreams he had in which his sheaf rose, and all his brothers' sheaves bowed before his, as well as the other one in which the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. Under guise, Joseph questioned his unwitting brothers and accused them of being spies. Cotter says of this encounter, "Along with recognition comes memory, both of the dreams and of their cruelty to him, so he decides to test them."<sup>44</sup> Skinner, however, denies a straightforward reason for Joseph's reaction, saying, "... to say that his object was merely to punish them, is clearly inadequate. To the writers, as to the brethren, the official Joseph is an inscrutable person, whose motives defy analysis; and it is probably a mistake to try to read a moral meaning into all the devices by which his penetrating knowledge of the human heart is exemplified."<sup>45</sup> However, in his book, *The Lord of the Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37-50*, Ron Pirson believes Joseph's treatment

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<sup>43</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," *The New Interpreter's Bible* 1, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 627.

<sup>44</sup> Cotter, *Genesis*, 306-07.

<sup>45</sup> Skinner, *Genesis*, 475.

of his brothers is not necessarily thought out, but is a projection of his childhood trauma.

He states,

... the reader can detect an allusion to Joseph's former occupation, which the narrator reported in Gen. 37.2: 'and he brought their evil reports to his father.' In his youth he himself was the messenger (or provider?) of slander: he used to be a spy himself. ... The recollection of his dreams causes images of the past to return to the surface: the dreams evoke his own spying in his teenage years. And this now enters Joseph's mind as an appropriate accusation.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever the reason for Joseph's distance may be, Joseph reacted, accusing his brothers of being spies. The brothers attempted to explain why they had truly come, but Joseph again accused them of spying. In verse 13, they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more." Once more, he accused the brothers of being spies and he decided to test them, saying, "... as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here!" He had his brothers sent to prison for three days, where they were "tested" to determine the truth of their story. When he released them, he told them to go back to Canaan and return with their youngest brother, Benjamin. Joseph threatened that if they did not return with their brother, they would die. Distressed, they began to blame one another for finding themselves in this predicament because of the harm they had done to Joseph. Reuben spoke out, rebuking his brothers, reminding them that he told them not to harm Joseph. All the while, however, Joseph was listening, though they were unaware because he had been speaking through an interpreter. Joseph turned away to weep after hearing his brothers confess their guilt, and Reuben's recollection of his warning, which they chose not to heed. When he came back, he took

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<sup>46</sup> Pirson, *Dreams*, 95.

their brother, Simeon, detaining him and holding him as collateral until they would come back to Egypt. In W. Gunther Plaut's commentary on Genesis, he says, "Literary artistry here introduces a delay that heightens suspense and reflects Joseph's own inner conflict. He still wants revenge more than he wants love, and so he proceeds to imprison the most aggressive of his brothers and to subject his father to the severest trial: giving up... the beloved Benjamin."<sup>47</sup> A Jewish Midrash, *Sefer ha-Yashar*, declares that it was Simeon who suggested that Joseph be killed, so after Joseph hears the brothers bickering, he knows whom to hold captive, and whom to release.<sup>48</sup> Joseph then had their bags filled with grain, and he secretly had given back their silver they had used to pay for their grain. When they had realized that they each still had their silver, they began to panic, hoping they would be seen as the honest Hebrews they had sworn they were. The brothers trembled and wailed in fear, "What is this that God has done to us?" Brueggemann states, "Their sense of fatedness touches their understanding of God.... Their limited view of God requires a *quid pro quo* response to their own guilt.... They are unable to believe in any promissory God who might break beyond their hopeless mendacity."<sup>49</sup> Though the brothers may feel defeated and oppressed, they neglect to consider that God can be faithful, offer grace, and use the situation they find themselves in for the greater good. This seems to be in stark contrast to their little brother, Joseph, who remained faithful to God even during his times of hopelessness and trial.

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<sup>47</sup> W. Gunther Plaut, "Genesis," *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 272.

<sup>48</sup> *Sefer ha-Yashar*, 41:25.

<sup>49</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 338.

However, Jacob was no better. After returning to the land of Canaan, the brothers reported back to their father, emptying their sacks. They saw the money they were to spend on the food and were dismayed. Jacob said, “I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!” Cotter explains, “Jacob’s lack of real awareness of the other highlights for us readers Joseph’s intense consciousness of the other and his manipulation of events to create a desired end. What is a haphazard world trying to hurt him is for Joseph a place to carefully test his brothers and create a place for him and his family to thrive.”<sup>50</sup> Jacob illustrates a lack of awareness of a bigger picture, while Joseph exemplifies a trust in something greater than himself, and a willingness to take matters into his own hands when necessary.

After spending some time in the land of Canaan, Jacob and his family had used up all the food that had been brought from Egypt. Beginning in chapter 43, Jacob told the brothers to go back to Egypt to buy more food. Judah, however, warned him that they were told that when they were to return, they must have their youngest brother, Benjamin, with them. Jacob reluctantly agreed. He had them pack their bags full of “choice fruits,” as well as double the money they had originally taken in case there was an oversight. In verse 13, Jacob said, “Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man.” What is noteworthy about this is that this is the first time Jacob referred to Benjamin as “your brother” rather than “my son.” Jacob was likely preparing for the worst and may have been psychologically and emotionally distancing himself from

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<sup>50</sup> Cotter, *Genesis*, 309-10.

Benjamin in case he would not return.<sup>51</sup> So the brothers set off to Egypt. When they arrived, they were met by Joseph's steward, whom he had sent out to greet them and invite them in, after seeing Benjamin with them. The brothers were summoned to enter Joseph's home, though they were frightened because of the silver they had found in their bags. They had explained to Joseph's steward that they had paid before, but mysteriously found their money in their bags. They mentioned that they had the money to return, as well as more to purchase. In verse 23, the steward replied, "Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money." Alter explains that the steward gives the brothers a "fairy-tale explanation" for how the money ended up in their bags.<sup>52</sup> Wenham, on the other hand, sees something larger at work:

The steward's reply, while reassuring the brothers who did not know where the money came from, disconcerts the reader, who does know that the steward put the money in their bags. His comment, "Your god ... must have put treasure in your sacks," while putting the brothers off the track of the human agent, does though express an important theological idea of the narrative, that God's plans are worked out through human agents... Here, even an Egyptian is portrayed as acknowledging the overarching control of human affairs by divine providence.<sup>53</sup>

Wenham stresses the importance of this theological notion because it is being played out throughout Joseph's story. God's will is accomplished through human agents, and through human agents, God blesses others. The steward may have had a keen observation on the work of the Hebrew God, or he may not have fully known the truth of his statement. Regardless of his awareness, the steward rightly credited God for the work,

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<sup>51</sup> Plaut, "Genesis," *Torah*, 275.

<sup>52</sup> Alter, "Genesis," *Books*, 170.

<sup>53</sup> Wenham, *Genesis*, 422.

even though it was done by the steward's own hands, at the command of Joseph. When the steward calmly assured the brothers that their money had been received, Simeon was brought out to them, and they were brought into Joseph's house to take part in a feast that was prepared for them. During the feast, Joseph inquired about the health of Jacob, to which the brothers responded that he is doing well. Then, he looked up and saw Benjamin, his full brother. In verse 29, he asks, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" Without waiting for a response, he says to Benjamin, "God be gracious to you, my son!" The scripture goes on to say, "With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there." After cleaning himself up, he returned to the feast, where Benjamin was given portions five times greater than the others.

Brueggemann highlights this special treatment:

The narrative gives no hint of why Joseph experiences this special yearning [toward Benjamin].... These are the two valued sons, all that remain from Rachel. A relation between them might be anticipated on that basis alone. But it is also plausible to suggest that unlike the other brothers, Joseph is not totally fixed on the past. He can think of the future, of the younger one, of the next generation.... He can be attentive to what is yet to come. In subsequent history, as these brothers become tribes, it is Benjamin and Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) who are the new Israel. It is they who shape the memory of the future. Perhaps Joseph is presented here as the one who still waits for what God is yet to give.<sup>54</sup>

The scholar believes that Joseph realizes that there is something greater at work than the present moment, which is enjoyed, to be sure. However, when he sees Benjamin, he sees the hope of the promise that was given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, for this reason, it seems that Joseph has trouble parting with his younger brother, just as Jacob had trouble parting with his youngest son. Historically, Benjamin's tribe was situated

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<sup>54</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 341.

between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, two of the northern tribes of Israel named after Joseph's sons, and the southern kingdom of Judah. This part of the narrative, then, might highlight Joseph's partiality toward Benjamin because of the literal middle ground that Benjamin had between the two kingdoms. In fact, when the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah split, the tribe of Benjamin was also split, with some portions of the land going to Israel, but most of the tribe going to Judah. In his article, "'Israel's' Only Son?: The Complexity of Benjaminite Identity between Judah and Joseph," Benjamin D. Giffone says, "The Benjaminite territories... were the heart of the emerging and united Israel. Later, Benjamin was at the centre of a tug-of-war between Judah and the Northern coalition led by Manasseh and Ephraim. This political question is embedded Genesis 42–45: With whom does Benjamin belong?"<sup>55</sup> Joseph's favor toward Benjamin might then indicate the northern kingdom's desire to be united with the tribe of Benjamin, and the southern kingdom's concern over the possibility of losing the tribe.

In chapter 44, the brothers were sent away to travel back to Canaan. Joseph had his steward fill their bags with food, and their money was placed at the top of their bags as well. He specifically had his servant plant his silver cup in Benjamin's bag. After they had left, Joseph sent his steward out to retrieve it, and falsely accused Benjamin of stealing it. The brothers went back to the city in their grief, returning to Joseph's house. In his book, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, Bill T. Arnold submits that this incident was Joseph once again testing his brothers' character. He posits,

Joseph's chalice was symbolic of his authority. Many thought such goblets could be used to predict the future, and that they had supernatural powers. Joseph

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<sup>55</sup> Benjamin D. Giffone, "'Israel's' Only Son?: The Complexity of Benjaminite Identity between Judah and Joseph," *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 3 (2019): 968, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2019/v32n3a10>.

himself had learned many years before that God revealed to him the future in the form of dreams. The drama unfolding before him was in fact the fulfillment of those dreams, since his brothers had already bowed before him several times as his dreams had predicted. Joseph certainly did not need the silver cup. But to steal such a goblet was a serious crime. Joseph's trick would reveal once and for all if his brothers would betray Benjamin as they had once betrayed him, and whether his brothers had actually changed during the intervening years.<sup>56</sup>

Joseph is relatively secure in his future. His brothers, however, are none the wiser. What would happen if they do not return Benjamin home to their worried father? What would happen to their divine inheritance if none of them make it back to Canaan?

Judah spoke up to plead on behalf of the group in verse 16, saying, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession the cup has been found." Joseph was not pleased with this response, answering, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father." Judah knew this would not work. Concerned over his father and his attachment to Benjamin, he pleaded with Joseph to reconsider keeping Benjamin as a slave, stating in verse 30, "...when [Jacob] sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol." Judah was not willing to see his father die in grief, so he insisted, "... please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father." Judah's speech here is critical. This is exactly what Joseph needed

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<sup>56</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 158.



to see from his brothers in order to trust them. In the work, *Joseph and His Family*, by W.

Lee Humphreys, the scholar comments,

Judah's speech reveals that profound changes have taken place in the brothers, that they have changed in their very acceptance of what will not change and what they cannot change. Their father will love one son more than the others; love is not nicely balanced, and its disproportions can result in pain and insensitivity. But even one who loves in an excess that must result in imbalances and pain can be understood, and must be loved, for through this love runs ties that bind sons to father.<sup>57</sup>

Jacob's favoritism that has transferred from Joseph to Benjamin is clear, but what is also clear is that the brothers will not betray each other to escape their fate. In fact, they will put themselves at risk to save one another for the sake of the father they love. This crucial point is noted when Judah surrenders himself in his brother's place. The brothers have passed the test, and Humphreys notes, "The brothers demonstrate this change, but the distance between them and Joseph is immense and now cries out to be bridged."<sup>58</sup> Because they do not realize they have been interacting with Joseph all along, the idea that this distance can be bridged, or even must be, does not seem like a possibility.

The fact that Judah had changed so much, he would trade his life for his younger brother's, was the indication that his brothers had indeed changed. Chapter 45 picks up with Joseph becoming so deluged with emotion, that he was unable to contain his secret any longer. He sent everyone besides his brothers away. Weeping so loudly the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh could hear him, he revealed himself to his brothers as their long-lost brother, saying, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" His brothers were left confused and speechless. Joseph continued,

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<sup>57</sup> Humphreys, *Family*, 48-49.

<sup>58</sup> Humphreys, *Family*, 49.

Come closer to me... I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.<sup>59</sup>

Incidentally, Joseph's revelation of his true identity, which he had kept hidden, coincides with the revelation of God and God's true purpose, concealed within the events of the story. In the end, this is what Joseph's dreams at the very beginning of his story had indicated; not that he would wield power over his brothers, but that he would be placed in a position of authority in order to save the people of God.<sup>60</sup> Everything Joseph had gone through, from being sold into slavery, to overseeing Potiphar's house; from his unjust prison sentence, to managing the jailhouse; from being forgotten by Pharaoh's cupbearer, to his rise in prominence as Pharaoh's second in command, God was with him. Through it all, the time Joseph spent in Egypt was a time of preparation for this moment. Altar states that Joseph's "... recognition of a providential plan may well be admirable from the viewpoint of monotheistic faith, but there is no reason to assume that Joseph has lost the sense of his own brilliant initiative in all that he has accomplished, and so when he says 'God,' he also means 'Joseph.'"<sup>61</sup> Likewise, Brueggemann is in agreement, saying, "The narrative asserts that God's purpose is finally sovereign. It will not be questioned or altered. It may be held in abeyance, but it works with and through every human action. It

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<sup>59</sup> Gen. 45:4-8.

<sup>60</sup> Hillel J. Chiel, "Joseph, The Master of Dreams," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 9. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23262988>.

<sup>61</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 177.

makes use even of the dark side of human action and planning.”<sup>62</sup> Coats elaborates on this same idea:

At the point of the brothers’ treachery against Joseph, there is no allusion to God’s purpose. The brothers did intend to dispose of Joseph.... But they were the agents of Joseph’s descent into Egypt.... [T]he reference to God as the actual agent in the event does not imply that God arranged the brothers’ treachery. It does not root in the past. Rather, given the events that emerged around Joseph, God’s agency relates to intentions for the future.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, God’s purposes do not control human behavior and action, but God will use events caused by human freewill to bring about events that had been rooted in God’s eternal mind. God’s plan did not include Joseph’s descent into slavery or prison, but God remained with Joseph and God brought good out of Joseph’s despair. This is seen on a larger scale with the famine. The famine is a consequence of an impaired world, but God used the freewill of individuals to whom were given dreams and interpretations. Through Joseph, Egypt was divinely blessed, as had been the pattern seen throughout the story, but also, the line of Israel would be spared.

Beginning in Genesis 45:9, Joseph went on to tell his brothers, who are still in shock at this revelation, to evade the famine by relocating their families, including their father Jacob, their flocks and herds, and all their possessions to Egypt. They were to settle in the land of Goshen, where Joseph would provide for all their needs.

When Pharaoh had heard that Joseph’s brothers had come to Egypt, he welcomed and accommodated them, telling Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘... Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt,

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<sup>62</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 377.

<sup>63</sup> Coats, “Canaan,” *Catholic*, 45.

and you may enjoy the fat of the land.’ ... Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.”<sup>64</sup> With this blessing, the entire family of Jacob moved into Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen, where they were given the task to look after and care for Pharaoh’s livestock.

This agreement was indeed generous, yet the famine was still far from over. Genesis 47:13-26 explains that the situation was so dire, even in Egypt, that the Egyptians sold their own livestock to Pharaoh in exchange for food. The following year, having yet again run out of resources, the people of Egypt came to Joseph saying that all they had left was their bodies and their land. They said to Joseph, “Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.” Joseph agreed. Using his acute administrative leadership skills, he formulated a plan that would sustain the nation. All the land was sold to Pharaoh, and the people gave themselves to him as slaves in order to endure the famine and subsequent economic depression. Through it all, Pharaoh’s wealth and power increased, setting the stage for the captivity of the Hebrew people by the Egyptians as seen in Exodus, one of the Old Testament’s largest themes. However, had this agreement not happened, the result of the famine would be much more devastating, and it would claim many more casualties. Yet still, even through centuries of enslavement, struggle, and hardship, God had blessed the children of Israel through Joseph as they continued to increase in the land.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Gen. 45:18, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Arnold, *Encountering*, 161.

Jacob passed away in Egypt at the age of 147, what would be 17 years after he and his family had relocated.<sup>66</sup> Before passing away, however, he was sure to bless his sons, as his father, Isaac, had done with him and his twin brother, Esau.<sup>67</sup> This was to ensure that the inheritance God promised Abraham would be passed on throughout the family line. Each son was given his blessing. Reuben, however, was stripped of his due to his sins, and Joseph was given a double portion.<sup>68</sup> This was split between his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, whom Jacob considered his own.

When Jacob had died in chapter 50, Joseph's brothers, afraid that he may still be harboring a grudge against them, begged Joseph for his forgiveness claiming, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father."<sup>69</sup> Westermann notes that scholars do not necessarily have a consensus on whether the brothers' words are true or not. The story does not account for this, though it is possible the brothers were told by Jacob to be sure of their good standing with their brother, Joseph.<sup>70</sup> It is apparent that Jacob's sons are afraid that Joseph may retaliate for how they treated him long ago. Joseph was moved to tears, perhaps hurt that his brothers did not trust him, and he explained to them that they have no reason to fear: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for

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<sup>66</sup> Gen. 47:28.

<sup>67</sup> Gen. 27.

<sup>68</sup> The story of why Reuben's blessing was ultimately ripped away can be read in Genesis 35.

<sup>69</sup> Gen. 50:16-17.

<sup>70</sup> Westermann, *Genesis*, 204.

good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.”<sup>71</sup> Joseph had already forgiven his brothers because he understood that there was a larger purpose to his suffering. The narrative’s pattern indicates that the brothers are quite short-sighted, while Joseph tends to have a stronger faith in a God-ordained grander purpose. Joseph trusts in the God that has been with him, who brought him up from slavery to govern Egypt. He trusts in the God who grew him from a spoiled boy bragging about his dreams of greatness to a man through whom many would be saved. Certainly, Joseph acknowledged the severity of what his brothers had done to him. He called their actions “evil,” after all. However, to the degree that his brothers acted with evil intentions, God’s degree of “good” would be much, much greater. Wenham says, “... it seems to be suggested that, through the suffering of the righteous Joseph at the hand of his wicked brothers, life was brought to the world.... In Joseph... the promises to Abraham of universal blessing to all nations began to see fulfillment.”<sup>72</sup> His entire life was forming him in tenacity, endurance, determination, and leadership, and through it all, he was able to persevere and succeed because “God was with him.” With the good that God brought out of this evil, the idea of forgiveness was far from Joseph’s mind. As far as he understood, the matter had been settled years ago.<sup>73</sup> Years later, even on his own deathbed, Joseph reminded his brothers of the great promise God had given to their great-grandfather, Abraham, that he would be the father of a great nation. The children of Israel had come to Egypt that they

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<sup>71</sup> Gen. 50:20.

<sup>72</sup> Wenham, *Genesis*, 493.

<sup>73</sup> E. A. Speiser, “Genesis,” *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Company, 1982), 62,

may be spared from death, but they will return to the land of Canaan and be established as the nation of Israel.

### **Conclusion**

The summation of the entirety of the Joseph story is found in Genesis 45:4-8. Everything that Joseph had been through up until that point, from his dreams of greatness, to his descension into slavery and prison, to his subsequent rise as governor of Egypt, all led to this moment in which he confronts his brothers. Here in this passage, it is revealed that everything that had happened is ultimately for the glory of God, that God's people might survive, thrive, and prevail. From that moment on, the narrative focuses on Joseph using his administrative gifts as a leader to bring his family into the prosperity of the land of Egypt, and to supply all of Egypt with food in times of scarcity. The rest of the story expresses how his brothers had been blessed as nations as a result of the salvation God brought through Joseph, and that one day, they would even be brought out of the land of Egypt to go into the land that God had promised their ancestor, Abraham.

Despite them having sold him into slavery, Joseph explains to his brothers that they have no need to be distressed or angry, as it was God who used his trials to prepare him, forming him into an administrative leader to save the people of Israel. God had given Joseph two dreams in which he had received his calling. Though he did not know what that calling initially looked like, it became clear to him only after he had gone through his own adversity. In fact, it was through his adversity that he would be prepared to the level of leadership to which God was calling him. In their commentary on Genesis, scholars Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa explain that as Joseph was given the

highest office under Pharaoh, “He must now have been grateful for the years of preparation that God had given him as he had learned first to manage a household and then an institution. God had given Joseph intelligence, wisdom, and practical training.”<sup>74</sup> Joseph, having been enslaved, became Potiphar’s head of the house. Then, after having been thrown into prison, Joseph was placed in charge of overseeing the jailhouse. Though Joseph would be met with unfortunate circumstances, God remained with Joseph, and used these times to develop him in administrative leadership. Through it all, he would succeed, and then be a blessing to others. Now, when facing a devastating famine, Joseph knew exactly what must be done in order to ensure that Egypt will be more than prepared for what was to come. Joseph had God-given gifts, but like anyone, he needed to be tried and tested in his gifts in order to become a stronger, more prepared leader for the purpose God had for his calling.

Just as God had given Joseph an important calling that he had to practice and in which he had to be formed, God also has called each in the church to a specific ministry for God’s purpose. Proverbs 27:17 says, “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.” Ministers are better prepared when they have well-practiced and informed mentors overseeing them who can help guide them in their God-given gifts. Even though some may feel as if going through seminary is inconsequential to what God has called them to do, it stands to reason that having Godly council preparing a person for his or her work will only be advantageous to becoming the leader God desires the person to be. God had no ill-will toward Joseph, who found himself time and time again in

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<sup>74</sup> Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, “Genesis,” *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi, Kenya: World Alive Publishers; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 71.



uncertain situations. Yet God remained with Joseph in those times, and Joseph remained faithful to God. God, then, helped Joseph to succeed in all he set out to accomplish, and he became a blessing to others in the process.

Trials come in many ways. For Joseph, his trials came by people behaving in perfidious manners, wishing specifically to bring him harm in some fashion. The trials one may face in seminary are not caused by such duplicitous means. The adversities many seminary students will face are more likely to be ones that are encountered in the difficulties and struggles involved in their academic work. Such hardships are not without purpose, however. This is how God works. God will call anyone from any walk of life, and in the right time, God will work in any and every circumstance to bring about the greater good. No matter where a person finds his or herself, God will create the opportunities to prepare those who remain faithful. When incoming seminary students feel overwhelmed by what is required by master's-level work, as Joseph told his brothers, there is no need to be distressed or angry. It is God who has sent them. God will work in them right where they are, so that through their preparation, faithfulness, dedication, and hard work, they will be a blessing to others.

United Theological Seminary's mission statement is that they "prepare faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ." United understands that the seminary plays an integral role in the formation and preparation of its students. There is also, then, an implication that they must do all in their power to come alongside the students they admit into the master's program, to not only help prepare them in their ministry, but to prepare them for the academic rigors that are required. The Writing Center can provide this preparation with a preliminary orientation course, designed to

help new and incoming master's students understand the level of research and writing to which they agree.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Many master's students beginning their formal education at United are not fully prepared for the high academic-level work that is required of their respective programs. Among these students are those who may not even understand why they have found themselves in seminary. Rather than seeing this opportunity as a time of preparation that God is leading them through, seminary is viewed as one of many hoops to jump through in order to get to where God is calling them. With no objective, a number of these students will surely struggle in their academics, especially those who come to seminary with no understanding of the workload involved.

Viewing seminary as a form of preparation, however, is a key component to assure academic success. Yet, it is not so much the academics that is important. It is the Christian formation God brings through a prescribed process. This formation is what prepares one to become an effective minister worthy of one's calling. This was not something that was missed by the Methodists in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when formal education for their clergy was becoming more and more of a necessity in a quickly evolving America. Though there were some who disagreed with the push toward formalized education, Methodism since John Wesley himself has always placed a

ministerial emphasis on the value of education. Education is formational. The question of concern is, what is one being formed into?

The focus of this chapter will center on how the ministerial education of clergy played a large role in the personal and professional formation of early Methodist ministers. As United is a theological institution of The United Methodist Church, the history of Methodist clergy formation is apropos to how its students will be formed. It will track the evolving view of education beginning at the foundation of the Methodist movement in the late 18th century, bringing an explicit focus on John Wesley's own understanding of the importance of the education of clergy. It will then examine the rise of lay clergy in American Methodism, and the need for a process of education for their intellectual and ministerial advancement. From there, the chapter will follow the Methodist movement as it expands into the American western frontier in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, as Methodist churches began establishing seminaries. Finally, the chapter will discuss the desire among much of the Methodist clergy to formalize their education through attending seminary, which would eventually become the norm for ordained clergy by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. All of this will indicate the unique way in which Methodism has historically attempted to balance a high regard for education while, in addition, embodying the pragmatism that had made the Methodist movement so successful.

Because many students who are coming into United's master's programs are doing so unprepared for the rigors of the academic work that is required, the project is the implementation of an orientation course for new and incoming students. In this course, students became familiarized with the basics of writing academic papers, to properly

acclimate them to the quality of writing that United's faculty will expect. However, it is important to note that many of those who feel underprepared for seminary may not have a strong understanding of why they even are in seminary. In many cases, certain denominations require a seminary education for their ordained clergy. Inevitably, many of the ministers in such a position will view the seminary requirement as an obstacle in the way of their calling, rather than a means to prepare them for their calling. This foundations chapter, then, will serve to elaborate on the precedent of clergy education in Methodism, so that those who struggle to see the importance of seminary can perhaps find purpose through a shared Wesleyan history, as well as understand the formation brought about through academic work.

### **Foundations of Methodist Educational Formation**

From its very beginning, the Methodist movement held achieving education as an important value and asset toward ministry. George Whitefield, and brothers, John and Charles Wesley, each a co-founder of Methodism, were University of Oxford-educated men. John particularly was a large proponent of literacy, believing it to be helpful in Christian growth.<sup>1</sup> In 1739, with a strong focus on education, Whitefield began raising funds to build a school in Kingswood, England that would allow the children of converted colliers to receive an education. Whitefield then handed this project off to his mentor, Wesley, who took over raising funds.<sup>2</sup> In 1748, he opened Methodism's first of

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<sup>1</sup> Stan Ingersol, "Education," *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, ed. Jason Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 261.

<sup>2</sup> A. G. Ives, *Kingswood School in Wesley's Day and Since* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 2.

many educational institutions, Kingswood School, providing children an atmosphere of scholastic and religious learning.<sup>3</sup>

Aside from his deep commitment to the education of children, Wesley's commitment also extended to adult Christians as well. He encouraged his Societies to read, believing that those Christians who do not embrace reading as a regular practice will hinder their growth.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Justo L. González mentions in his book, *The History of Theological Education*, that "John Wesley compiled and published his *Christian Library*, which included fifty books that he invited every believer—and certainly all Methodist preachers—to read and to study."<sup>5</sup> Whether it was for children, adults, clergy, or laity, education was evidently seen as necessary for the Methodist movement, even in a largely illiterate society. Initially, however, not much attention was being paid to the formal education of the ministers of Methodism. What could have caused such a hesitancy in a movement started by highly learned individuals who valued the educational endeavors of its preachers?

### Pietism and Wesley

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<sup>3</sup> Ives, *Kingswood*, 21. It is also noteworthy that early Methodists established other schools as well (e.g., Cokesbury School). See E. B. Chappell, *Recent Development of Religious Education in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1935), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Chappell, *Recent*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 119.

The pietistic roots of Methodism may be one reason for such an apprehension toward formal education for clergy. González indicates that Pietism itself was “a protest against the intellectualism of Protestant orthodoxy.”<sup>6</sup> He explains,

What concerned [Pietists] about Protestant scholasticism was not its intellectual rigor but rather that the resulting preaching and pastoral practice did not help the flock to experience the love of Christ more deeply, to grow in faith, and to improve in obedience. Sermons had become long theological disquisitions on points with no clear relevance for the life of the flock. Often the real audience of such sermons was not the congregation present but some other pastor or movement against which the preacher directed his words.<sup>7</sup>

For Pietists, the Christian religion was not simply an intellectual exercise; it was a way of life connecting the mind to the heart. Philip Jacob Spener, a 17th century German Lutheran whom many consider to be the father of Pietism, wrote in his book popularly known as *Pia Desideria*, “... students should unceasingly have it impressed upon them that holy life is not of less consequence than diligence and study, indeed that study without piety is worthless.”<sup>8</sup> For Spener, receiving an education is well and good, but it is not a virtue of Christianity in and of itself. Knowledge for the sake of vanity only becomes a hinderance to the Christian way of life. The fruit of the Christian faith is shown by what the Christian does. Spener later writes, “It is certain that a young man who fervently loves God, although adorned with limited gifts, will be more useful to the church of God with his meager talent and academic achievement than a vain and worldly fool with double doctor’s degrees who is very clever but has not been taught by God.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> González, *History*, 95.

<sup>7</sup> González, *History*, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 104.

<sup>9</sup> Spener, *Pia*, 108.

This matches Wesley's own convictions. Even though he was an Oxford-educated man himself, Wesley still agreed that a heart directed toward the ways of God is much better than simply a head full of information about God. He once famously wrote in a letter to fellow Methodist minister, Joseph Benson, "... beware you be not swallowed up in books: An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge."<sup>10</sup> This quote, though seemingly unobtrusive, actually illustrates early Methodism's apparent contradicting point of view regarding clergy education quite well. Education is a tool that can be of good use, but it is not something that ought to be assimilated with an individual's pride. Especially if the individual is leading others in the way of Christ.

Wesley, though thoroughly Anglican, was highly influenced by the Moravians, a group of German Pietists led by Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf, incidentally, was the godchild of the aforementioned Philip Spener.<sup>11</sup> Wesley was quite impressed with the faith that the Moravians showed during his chance encounter with the group in 1735. While on a ship heading from England to the colony of Georgia, a series of storms came that caused a great deal of discomfort to those aboard, and put fear into the hearts of many, including Wesley. As the waves came crashing onto the ship, breaking sails and creating havoc, he heard the screams of the English, but found the Moravians calmly singing Psalms as if they had no fear of death. In fact, so great was their faith that it was reported to Wesley that none of them had any fear of death.<sup>12</sup> The encounter left him with doubts concerning the sufficiency of his own faith, and this

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<sup>10</sup> John Wesley to Joseph Benson, November 7, 1768, in *Wesley's Works*, vol. 12, *Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 409.

<sup>11</sup> K. James Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1986), 144.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Waller, *John Wesley: A Personal Portrait* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 33-35.



ultimately would lead him to his famous “Aldersgate Experience.” On May 24, 1738, he writes,

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.<sup>13</sup>

Wesley’s heart-warming encounter with God convinced him of his salvation, something he had noted among his Moravian friends but did not have himself. Because of the Pietistic Moravian’s influence on Wesley, he was able to comprehend the change that took place in his spiritual life, and from that point on, his work and ministry also changed for the better.<sup>14</sup>

German Pietism placed more “practical focus on Christian living rather than intellectual acumen,” which helped Wesley in understanding his own notion that Christianity is a religion of the heart.<sup>15</sup> In his book, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Ted A. Campbell explains, “... Wesley reinterpreted the teachings of the Anglican tradition in the light of his new-found experience of the assurance of pardon.”<sup>16</sup> Through this theological innovation, Wesley was able to hold his High-Church Anglican heritage along with his newly understood pietism in tension. Yet, when these two seemingly contrasting

<sup>13</sup> John Wesley, *Wesley’s Works*, vol. 1, *Journals* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 103.

<sup>14</sup> L. Henry Welchel, “My Chains Fell Off,” *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, ed. Richard B. Steele (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 102.

<sup>15</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991) 120.

theological positions were merged, it became the basis of the heart of Methodism. Lester

Ruth notes that

American Methodists derived the hybrid quality to their religious life from John and Charles Wesley, the movement's founders. ... They devoted their mature ministry to developing a movement, supplemental to parish life in the Church of England, in which an "experimental" gospel could be proclaimed. This Methodist movement soon evolved its own system of lay preaching, discipleship, and worship. Both the structures and spirituality of the British movement were exported to America.<sup>17</sup>

American Methodism was formed completely from the Wesley brothers' desire to see reform and revival in their own country within the Church of England. The elder brother, John, once wrote to his father, Samuel, in 1734 saying that the bane of piety is "... lukewarm Christians, ... persons that have a great concern for, but no sense of, religion."<sup>18</sup> Wesley had an incredible distaste for what he perceived to be nominal Christianity. For this reason, González notes that "Eighteenth-century Pietism, exemplified... in the Methodism of the Wesley brothers, while holding orthodox theological views, insisted on the need of a theology and a preaching addressed more directly to the heart and not only to the mind."<sup>19</sup> In an effort to increase in personal holiness, Wesley met with a small group of Oxford students who read and discussed the Greek New Testament together. This group would become known as the "Holy Club," and then later referred to as the "Methodists," for the methods they had developed to grow in piety. Wesley writes,

They were all zealous members of the Church of England, not only tenacious of all her doctrines, so far as they knew them, but of all her discipline, to the

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<sup>17</sup> Lester Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 21-22.

<sup>18</sup> John Wesley to Samuel Wesley, December 10, 1734, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 25, "Letters 1: 1721-1739," ed. Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 400.

<sup>19</sup> González, *History*, 120.

minutest circumstances. They were likewise zealous observers of all the university statutes, and that for conscience' sake. But they observed neither these nor anything else any further than they conceived it was bound upon them by their one book, *the Bible*, it being their one desire and design to be downright *Bible Christians*—taking the Bible, for their whole and sole rule.<sup>20</sup>

Wesley, as an Anglican clergyman, used the methods he employed to grow in personal holiness, along with the Pietism he had initially encountered through the Moravians, and combined those with his life-changing “Aldersgate experience” and field preaching. This is what would begin the “third rise” of the Methodist movement, which came about as England entered into the “Evangelical Revival.” This era was notable due to “strong preaching, evangelical conversions, and assorted manifestations of spiritual vitality, ranging from increased individual piety to enthusiastic group frenzy.”<sup>21</sup> It was in this time that Methodism found an exponential surge in interest.

### **The Growth of Methodism**

Early Methodism exemplified this Pietistic conviction that Christianity is a “religion of the heart.” Wesley maintained that this idea is central to one’s Christian discipleship, and the fruits of this notion were being made known among the vast expansion of the movement. Those whom Wesley was winning over through his preaching were placed into societies in which they would meet “for fellowship, for mutual support and for Christian education.”<sup>22</sup> These societies consisted of people who

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<sup>20</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, “The Methodist Societies, History, Nature, and Design,” ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 368.

<sup>21</sup> Heitzenrater, *People*, 97.

<sup>22</sup> Adrian Burdon, *Authority and Order: John Wesley and his Preachers* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2005), 19.

were primarily members of the Church of England. They did not consider themselves “dissenters” by any means, and Wesley was intentional about scheduling meetings around regular service in order to encourage members to worship and participate in communion.<sup>23</sup> The society members were then split into classes, each with about 12 members. The Class Meetings were initially put in place as a means to pay off a debt to a newly constructed preaching chapel that housed the Methodist societies, called “New Room.” Each member of the class paid a weekly due of one penny.<sup>24</sup> It was soon realized, however, that some members in the Class Meeting were not living up to the Christian standards which they were expected to meet. Wesley had already appointed a leader over each class who was responsible for collecting the weekly dues, but he came to understand that these leaders “... were ideally situated to address the lack of discipline....”<sup>25</sup> This system of accountability made it easier to track the fruitfulness of each individual’s life. It became the leader’s responsibility to, among other administrative responsibilities, keep track of attendance, receive funds for the poor, inquire about the state of the soul of each member, and “advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require.”<sup>26</sup>

Eventually, the number of societies increased so substantially that Wesley, with his busy schedule, could no longer maintain the responsibility of overseeing them on his

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<sup>23</sup> David N. Field, *Bid Our Jarring Conflicts Cease: A Wesleyan Theology and Praxis of Church Unity* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 2017), 38.

<sup>24</sup> Kevin Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed, 2014), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Watson, *Class*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Wesley, “General Rules of the United Societies,” in *Works*, 9:70.

own. Because much of the Anglican clergy seemed to be avoiding Methodism, finding preachers to oversee the societies was becoming increasingly difficult. He hesitantly decided to appoint local assistants of the laity to aid in the management of Methodist societies. Wesley tasked these assistants, primarily, with the duty to preach.<sup>27</sup> However, the appointing of laity to such a ministry stood much against the standards and expectations of the Church of England at the time, who typically required their ministers to be educated and ordained.<sup>28</sup> Wesley reasoned,

What could they do in a case of so extreme necessity? Where so many souls lay at stake?

No clergyman would assist at all. The expedient that remained was to find someone among themselves who was upright of heart, and of sound judgment in the things of God, and to desire him to meet the rest as often as he could, in order to confirm them, as he was able, in the ways of God, either by reading to them, or by prayer, or by exhortation.

God immediately gave a blessing hereto. In several places, by means of these plain men, not only those who had already begun to run well were hindered from drawing back to perdition, but other sinners also from time to time were converted from the error of their ways.

The plain account of the whole proceeding I take to be the best defense of it. I know no Scripture which forbids making use of such help in a case of such necessity. And I praise God who has given even this help to those poor sheep when ‘their own shepherds pitied them not’.<sup>29</sup>

Among the laity were men who were not only willing to take on the responsibility of preaching but were also themselves dedicated to growing in their sanctification. Wesley found their appointments to be reasonable, appropriate, and fruitful.

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<sup>27</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 108.

<sup>28</sup> Field, *Bid*, 40.

<sup>29</sup> John Wesley, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part III,” *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11, “The Appeals,” ed. Gerald R. Cragg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 368.

These lay preachers were, largely, uneducated men. In his book, *Authority and Order: John Wesley and His Preachers*, author Adrian Burdon says,

John Wesley's preachers and Assistants were not the educated élite who would, for example, be found amongst the leadership of the established churches. There were, more usually, uncomplicated artisans who had been enlivened and empowered by a sense of the presence of the living God acting in their lives. They were required to hold no qualification save that of a sense of call from God evidenced by a growth in wisdom and grace.<sup>30</sup>

Because of their lack of proper education, Wesley's lay preachers faced wide criticism and ridicule in Britain.<sup>31</sup> Yet despite poor treatment, his ministry thrived. The idea to utilize lay preachers also became a necessary tool later on in the Methodist movement in America.

### **The Rise of American Methodism**

Methodism in America began with Irish Methodists who had immigrated to America in the 1760's. The American colonies during "the First Great Awakening" already had a taste of Methodism through the popular Methodist preacher, and friend of the Wesley brothers, George Whitefield.<sup>32</sup> However, in the following decades, as Irish lay preachers such as Philip Embury and Robert Strawbridge began to immigrate to America, Methodism began to quickly expand in the colonies. Subsequently, Wesley began to send

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<sup>30</sup> Burdon, *Authority*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Burdon, *Authority*, 29.

<sup>32</sup> K.S. Latourette, "Great Awakening," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 6 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2003), 425.

more itinerant lay preachers across the sea, along with Francis Asbury, advancing the ever-expanding movement in America.<sup>33</sup>

As the colonies were experiencing a Methodist proliferation, there was also an increasing divide between the Methodists and the Anglicans. This is primarily due to augmenting tensions between the British colonies in America and Great Britain. As the Revolutionary War was becoming an inevitable conclusion for America to gain independence, many ministers of the Church of England in the United States were either fleeing to Britain or Canada. Asbury, a lay preacher at the time, in his neutrality to the war, secluded himself fearing, somewhat rightfully, that his pacifism was being seen as disloyalty to the cause of the patriots.<sup>34</sup> This put Wesley in a tough position by the end of the American Revolution. With no ordained clergy available to provide the sacraments, sidestepping the traditions of his church, he reluctantly took it upon himself as a presbyter to ordain Anglican priest, Dr. Thomas Coke, as a “superintendent” on September 2, 1784.<sup>35</sup> In a letter to “Our Brethren in America,” Wesley explained that there is no ecclesiastical authority in Methodist-affiliated churches whatsoever since the former colonies had cut themselves off from their ties to England and its state church. He expressed his conviction that “... bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain.” Explaining that he never acted upon his

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<sup>33</sup> R. Stoody, “Methodist Churches Part II: North America,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 9 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2003), 560.

<sup>34</sup> Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 37.

<sup>35</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 23, “Journal and Diaries VI: 1776-1788,” eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 497.

conviction so as to “not violate the established order” of the Church of England, Wesley justifies,

But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction: in America there are none, neither any parish ministers. So that for some hundred miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord’s supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order and invade no man’s right by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest.<sup>36</sup>

As far as he was concerned, America was in an extraordinary state, and for the sake of their souls, Wesley felt necessitated to make provisions, even if they were counter to what his church had always taught.

After Coke was ordained as a superintendent for America, Wesley charged him to ordain lay pastor, Francis Asbury, as first a deacon, then an elder, and then a superintendent. In Wesley’s mind, though he was never an ordained bishop in the Church of England, he believed he “functioned as a bishop, in the theological, spiritual, and practical sense of the historic concept of that episcopacy, among the Methodists.”<sup>37</sup> In a letter to his friend, Barnabas Thomas, Wesley admitted, “... I know myself to be as real a Christian bishop as the Archbishop of Canterbury. Yet I was always resolved, and am so still, never to act as such except in case of necessity. Such a case does not (perhaps never will) exist in England. In America it did exist.”<sup>38</sup> Though it was not a measure supported

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<sup>36</sup> John Wesley to Our Brethren in America, September 10, 1784, in *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, vol. 3, “The Letters,” eds. J. Manning Potts, Elmer T. Clark, and Jacob S. Payton (London: Epworth Press; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 37-38.

<sup>37</sup> Dennis M. Campbell, “Ministry and Itinerancy in Methodism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, eds. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 267.

<sup>38</sup> John Wesley to Barnabas Thomas, March 25, 1785, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* vol. VII, “March 23, 1780-July 24, 1787,” ed. John Telford (1931; repr., London: Epworth Press, 1960), 262.



by the Church of England, Wesley's controversial consideration of scripture and ecclesiology provided the Americans with the ability to have ordained leadership with a full episcopacy, and sacraments in a less-than-ideal circumstance.

The reins of Methodism in America were now given to superintendents Coke and Asbury to lead the movement. Additionally, Thomas Vasey and Richard Whatcoat were ordained as elders and appointed to America. Wesley even sent with Coke, Vasey, and Whatcoat the doctrinal standards, a hymnal, and a book of discipline to provide for the American Methodists. According to Gwang Seok Oh, in his book, *John Wesley's Ecclesiology: A Study in Its Sources and Development*, Wesley "... gave to his people in America all the forms of ritual, doctrinal confession, administration, and ministry which he deemed necessary for the maintenance of an independent and autonomous church."<sup>39</sup> Methodism in America was in fact becoming its own new denomination. Asbury, who was already understood to be the leader of Methodism in America, appreciated Wesley's plan to have him ordained, however, while trying to go about things in a more "American" way, he and Coke opted to hold a conference among Methodist preachers, where together, the body of preachers would democratically elect him as superintendent. Wesley's plan, then, is viewed as more of a nomination of Asbury and Coke. In 1784's Christmas Conference held in Baltimore, Maryland, Coke was unanimously elected to superintendency on Christmas day. Asbury was elected as a deacon on the same day, an elder the next, and on the third day, a superintendent.<sup>40</sup> To Wesley's dismay, in 1788,

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<sup>39</sup> Gwang Seok Oh, *John Wesley's Ecclesiology: A Study in Its Sources and Development* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 230.

<sup>40</sup> Russell A. Richey, "Early American Methodism," *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, ed. Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 51.

both Coke and Asbury dropped the term “superintendent,” believing that “bishop” suited their roll much better. After all, in America, they were given all the authority of a bishop in every respect.<sup>41</sup>

Now separated from the Church of England, for all intents and purposes, the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) gained autonomy to make its own localized decisions through conferencing and the sources provided by Wesley. With this new autonomy, the MEC also needed to design its own program for educating their clergy. In the Church of England, priests were educated through the theological institutions that were offered by the state. For American Methodists, this could no longer be the case. If Wesley desired that even the laity should be educated for their spiritual growth, then it was even more important for Methodist clergy to be educated, in order to teach the laity. In a 1774 letter to a Methodist preacher, William Duke, soon-to-be-elected Bishop Asbury writes, “Now my Brother give your heart to God, be faithful to the gift of God that is in you, be much in prayer and reading the word and other profitable books that your profiting may appear to all.... Take every opportunity of getting knowledge and always consider yourself as ignorant and as having everything to learn.”<sup>42</sup> It is evident that, like his predecessor, Wesley, Asbury did not desire to have ignorant preachers under his care. He was indeed mindful of the educational needs of those leading within Methodism.

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<sup>41</sup> Oh, *Ecclesiology*, 221-222.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Asbury to William Duke, March 4, 1774, in *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, eds. J. Manning Potts, Elmer T. Clark, and Jacob S. Payton, vol. 3, *The Letters* (London: Epworth Press; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 19.

As the new denomination was being formalized, such sentiments regarding the importance of disciplined study for Methodism's preachers did not wane. The early *Disciplines* of the Methodist Episcopal Church encouraged preachers to be diligent in their self-education and reading.<sup>43</sup> In *The Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, in their explanatory notes, bishops Coke and Asbury write concerning these instructions, "We would just recommend to our ministers and preachers... *much reading and study*. We have various ranks of men to deal with, and as far as possible should be prepared for them all; ... A taste for reading profitable books is an inestimable gift."<sup>44</sup> Means of self-education by reading, then, encouraged ministers and preachers to seek understanding beyond one's own knowledge in order to best minister to others.

Though early Methodism believed education to be highly valuable not only for ministry, but for life in general, there was initially no formal education available to ministers. However, Methodist education requirements were initially addressed at the Christmas Conference. Here, it was understood that Wesley's works and teachings needed to be made accessible in order for ministers to find guidance for ministry in his many publications.<sup>45</sup> This would be the primary basis of formation for Methodist

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<sup>43</sup> Russell E. Richey, *Formation for Ministry in American Methodism: Twenty-first Century Challenges and Two Centuries of Problem-Solving* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 2014), 17.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, "The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America," *The Methodist Discipline of 1798*, ed. Fredrick A. Norwood (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1978). 107.

<sup>45</sup> Richey, *Formation*, 13-14.

ministers, yet no official educational requirements were made. Elmer Guy Cutshall writes,

Until the year 1816, the theological training of the Methodist Minister, a training largely doctrinal, was left to the discretion of the individual, a discretion educated by Methodist tradition, enlivened by the demands of the discipline, and strengthened by the example and expectation of the founders of the Church and their early successors. No set group of studies was outlined, no formal examination upon prescribed books held, no special helps for directing the study of young ministers were afforded and no pecuniary assistance in purchasing books given by the Church.<sup>46</sup>

Clergy, from the beginning of Methodism, were encouraged to study on their own, in their own time. Wesley created his *Christian Library* for this very purpose, although it was never enforced upon the clergy themselves to study. Ministry was learned at its very best through application.

### **The Successes of Methodist Itinerancy**

Early Methodism found some success in their elaborate itinerancy system. After the Christmas Conference, preachers were being appointed to a number of churches within specific regions of the new country where circuits were being established. There were many practical reasons for this system, but one great advantage was that it “enabled substantial mentoring of younger preachers by experienced circuit riders with whom they traveled.”<sup>47</sup> According to Church historian, Russell E. Richey, Methodist circuit riders were sent out in pairs, just as Jesus had sent out the seventy disciples in Luke 10. These pairs were usually matched, younger beginning preacher, with an older, more seasoned

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<sup>46</sup> Elmer Guy Cutshall, “The Doctrinal Training of the Traveling Ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, Chicago, 1922).

<sup>47</sup> Douglas M. Koskela, “Discipline and Polity,” *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, ed. Jason E. Vickers. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 165.

preacher. This way, the younger had the opportunity to learn by experience as well as through mentorship.<sup>48</sup> In his autobiography, renowned early Methodist circuit rider turned politician, Peter Cartwright, writes about his time as a young circuit rider alongside his mentor, and the learning that happened under him. Cartwright recalls,

We had at this early day no course of study prescribed, as at present; but William M’Kendree, afterward bishop, but then my presiding elder, directed me to a proper course of reading and study. He selected books for me, both literary and theological; and every quarterly visit he made, he examined into my progress, and corrected my errors, if I had fallen into any. He delighted to instruct me in English grammar.<sup>49</sup>

Through this system, the denomination had reached a point of great success in reaching others by the early 1800’s. Michael K. Turner notes that in 1800, there were no more than 65,000 members in the MEC. Within the following 30 years, the membership grew to over 478,000. By the 1850’s, it had nearly tripled what it was 20 years prior. The expansion of Methodism was so immense that “nearly one of every fifteen Americans belonged to a Methodist church.”<sup>50</sup>

Such rapid growth was seen under the leadership of clergy who were, by and large, uneducated, other than the mentoring nature of the itinerancy system. Cartwright credits the incredible proliferation of Methodism to the accomplishments of Methodist itinerancy, as well as the counterintuitive brilliance of Wesley’s use of unlearned lay preachers. He speculates,

Suppose, now, Mr. Wesley had been obliged to wait for a literary and theologically trained band of preachers before he moved in the glorious work of his day, what would Methodism have been in the Wesleyan connection to-day?

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<sup>48</sup> Richey, *Formation*, 27-28.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher*, ed. W.P. Strickland (1856; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 78.

<sup>50</sup> Turner, “Revivalism,” *Cambridge*, 125.

Supposed the Methodist Episcopal Church in these United States had been under the necessity of waiting for men thus qualified, what would her condition have been at this time? In despite of all John Wesley's prejudices, he providentially saw that to accomplish the glorious work for which God had raised him up, he must yield to the superior wisdom of Jehovah, and send out his "lay preachers" to wake up a slumbering world.<sup>51</sup>

Cartwright gives credit to Wesley's foresight, but he also credits the wisdom of God to use Wesley in such a profound way at such an imperative time. In Wesley's own time and culture, his choice to use uneducated laity was considered by many to be shocking and inadvisable. His masterful leadership skills nevertheless prevailed, providing exactly what the world needed at the right time.

Though Cartwright praised the system employed by early Methodists, among some, there was cause for concern regarding the formal knowledge of some Methodist clergy. González writes, "The educational requirements that applied in England were inadequate for the new situation west of the Atlantic, with the eventual result that the biblical and theological training of many pastors was sorely lacking."<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Richey expounds on this, submitting that three factors were at work contributing to less-than-ideal education among pastors: ministerial salaries, locations, and scrounging for replacements in an increasingly growing mission field. Richey states, "Inadequate salary led many of the most able to 'locate' and thus necessitated the admission of those insufficiently gifted or prepared..." which led to unqualified and inept people to fill voids in the ministry.<sup>53</sup> To account for this, a two-year (later, four year) educational pathway became formalized in 1816 when the General Conference adopted into the *Discipline*

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<sup>51</sup> Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 78-79.

<sup>52</sup> González, *History*, 102.

<sup>53</sup> Richey, *Formation*, 33.

what would be called the “Course of Study.” The church legislation made it the duty of the bishops or their appointed committees to oversee this program in each’s annual conference to ensure clergy were being properly educated in their calling.<sup>54</sup> Many Methodist ministers criticized the Course of Study program for decades following its ratification into church discipline, arguing that such systematized learning would put preachers out of touch with the common people.<sup>55</sup> After all, such a pietistic understanding was the very heart of Methodism. However, the program was not entirely unlike the form of ministerial training Cartwright had received during his itinerancy.

### **Clergy Education for Methodists in Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century America**

By 1850, Methodists made up 34.2% of the population of the United States, “which is almost double the portion of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians put together,” says David Hempton, in his essay titled, “Methodist Growth in Transatlantic Perspective, ca. 1770-1850.”<sup>56</sup> Such vast expansion can be attributed to a variety of factors, but that it spoke to the common people is among the most significant reasons. Additionally, as Americans pushed westward, branching out into new frontiers, so did circuit-riding preachers. The Methodists had a system that was working beautifully for the purposes of evangelism. There appeared, to many, to be no reason to change their

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<sup>54</sup> James W. Fraser, *Schooling the Preachers: The Development of Protestant Theological Education in the United States, 1740-1875* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 91.

<sup>55</sup> Fraser, *Schooling*, 92.

<sup>56</sup> David Hempton, “Methodist Growth in Transatlantic Perspective, ca. 1770-1850,” *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 53.

system, including how the church educated its clergy. However, in many ways, the face of America had been changing which would require some adjustments to be made. For instance, with the expansion of the United States, circuit riders were settling with their congregations, and were quickly becoming obsolete. With the obsoleting of the circuit riders, so too would Methodism's system of education be seen as antiquated and unnecessary. In his book, *Hurrying toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism*, Conrad Cherry explains,

By the middle of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of Methodist ministers were settled pastors of frontier outposts and small towns rather than itinerant preachers. And like ministers in other denominations, by the time of the Civil War they were called to serve in a variety of professional posts such as teachers in academies, administrators of benevolence societies, and editors of religious publications. Furthermore, the American laypeople... were changing. They were going to college, frequently at one of Methodism's many small institutions of higher education, were advancing in social status because of their education, and were settling into comfortable professions in small-town America. With the emergence of industrial, urban America after the Civil War, Methodists also took their places in the cities and in the corporate world. Before the end of the nineteenth century, the people called Methodists were immersed in the currents of an upwardly mobile, urban, middle-class America.<sup>57</sup>

As Methodist preachers were domesticating, and the laity growing accustomed to the comforts of life, it was clear to many that post-Civil War America was rapidly changing. Several Methodists who wanted to see more formal education from the clergy believed that the time was ripe to adapt.

Not everyone was as eager. Some, like Cartwright, pointed to the higher education standards of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists as examples of ministerial failures. He writes,

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<sup>57</sup> Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 20-21.



I awfully fear for our beloved Methodism. Multiply colleges, universities, seminaries, and academies; multiply our agencies, and editorships, and fill them all with our best and most efficient preachers, and you localize the ministry and secularize them too; then farewell to itinerancy; and when this fails we plunge right into Congregationalism, and stop precisely where all other denominations started.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, what made Methodism unique among other denominations was that since its time in America, it had always been a lay-led movement that had proven to be successful. To delve into formal academics, and especially to integrate secularism into the church, would be to strip away some of the key components that make Methodism, Methodism.

Academics, of course, was nothing new to Methodism. By 1860, Methodists, who traditionally held education at all levels at high esteem, already had a total of forty-nine colleges in the United States.<sup>59</sup> These colleges served to provide an alternative to the private Calvinist or public secular education students might otherwise be receiving. They also provided ministerial formation for those aspiring to be pastors as well.<sup>60</sup> In Methodist colleges, clergy and laity were being educated together, providing a “... structured educational experience... offered in a form which did not ‘unfit’ one for ministry.”<sup>61</sup> Such a system would help to keep clergy from overeducation, to the point that they would be seen as out of touch. It would be their calling, rather than their education, that would set the clergy apart from the laity.

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<sup>58</sup> Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey Barbeau, *The Spirit of Methodism: From the Wesleys to a Global Communion*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 92.

<sup>60</sup> Richey, *Formation*, 40-43.

<sup>61</sup> Fraser, *Schooling*, 94-95.

In the mid-1800's, however, whereas many pastors did not view the ministry as a profession, but rather "an office to which one was called by God" wherein one "witnessed to experiences," the religious and social climate at the time did not portray the same understanding.<sup>62</sup> It was becoming increasingly clear to many that as society was evolving, so were the educational expectations for clergy. The case was being made that Methodist laity who were urbanizing, becoming "more affluent, and better educated," were eager to hear a more cultivated and sophisticated style of sermon. This was particularly true in some New England cities where church membership was beginning to decline.<sup>63</sup> These more prosperous areas were more open and welcoming to the idea of post-baccalaureate studies for Methodist pastors. Attempts to build a seminary for Methodist ministers had been happening since the late 1830's. Representatives from New England's annual conference came close with the opening of Newbury Biblical Institute in 1839, in Vermont.<sup>64</sup> In 1854, a second Biblical institution was built: Northwestern Biblical Institute, which would later be renamed Garrett Biblical Institute, in Chicago. Avoiding the term, "seminary," was a political decision which served to evade the ire of those who firmly held to traditional systems of Methodist clergy education.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, an institution differed from a seminary in that there was no prerequisite to

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<sup>62</sup> Fraser, *Schooling*, 134.

<sup>63</sup> Russell E. Richey, et. al., *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*, vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 245.

<sup>64</sup> Fraser, *Schooling*, 147.

<sup>65</sup> Russell E. Richey, et. al., *American Methodism: A Compact History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 116.

have a college degree, although that would change in time. Richey states that it would become highly encouraged that prospective students finish their studies before entering.<sup>66</sup>

As the Methodist social climate seemed to strongly call for seminaries, the push was made to transition to meet the demand. Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey was opened by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1867. Newbury Biblical Institute moved to Boston in 1868 and changed its name to Boston Theological Seminary.<sup>67</sup> For better or worse, the move toward Methodist theological seminaries had now been made. Other American branches of Methodism were also beginning to include seminaries as part of the clergy education as well. Vanderbilt University, with its divinity school, was founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1872. The Methodist Protestant Church opened Westminster Seminary in 1884. Methodist-adjacent denominations, such as the Evangelical Alliance, created a seminary in Naperville, Illinois in 1872, and the United Brethren in Christ began Union Biblical Seminary in 1871.<sup>68</sup>

Post-Civil War Methodism had quickly begun adapting to the changing culture. Ministers who would attend seminary initially found themselves among the minority, however, Turner writes that though formal education remained controversial in Methodism, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it would become much more routine for preachers to attend seminary.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the seminary pathway to ministry became so

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<sup>66</sup> Richey, *Formation*, 46-47.

<sup>67</sup> Ingersol, "Education," *Companion*, 274.

<sup>68</sup> Richey, et. al., *Experience*, 246.

<sup>69</sup> Turner, "Revivalism," *Cambridge*, 133.

commonplace in the MEC that by 1956, it was required by discipline, that if one was to pursue elder's orders, one must first receive a seminary education.<sup>70</sup> Those who desired to remain local pastors may have chosen to attend seminary, but were only obliged to go through the course of study program. Such discipline still exists today in the United Methodist Church.

### **Conclusion**

Methodism was first conceived in the pietistic minds of highly educated individuals and birthed out of the halls of a prestigious English university. From its very beginning, Methodism was never anti-intellectual. Those within the movement knew the power of education, both in how it can be used as a tool for one's own knowledge, and in its ability to shape and mold people. For this reason, education has always been a Methodist hallmark. Yet it was also approached with caution about the prospect of the secular world leaking into sacred knowledge. This tension can be especially seen in the Pietist origins of Methodism. The tensions surrounding a formalized education process for clergy, then, are understandable to those who are interested in keeping the call of God to holy living according to the way of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, it was not education in and of itself that was being argued as inappropriate for Methodist clergy. As it is said in proverbs, "Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another."<sup>71</sup> Rather, suitable schooling was and is of utmost importance to remain faithful to the teachings of Christ.

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<sup>70</sup> Richie, *Formation*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> Proverbs 27:17. All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Such is the goal of pietism: to connect the mind to the heart. A mind that is properly informed under the right conditions will undoubtedly strengthen one's ministry. A minister must become prepared. Therefore, United Theological Seminary as a United Methodist institution, carries the mission to "prepare faithful and fruitful leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ," and is committed to the historic faith, scriptural holiness, and church renewal.<sup>72</sup> United values the formation of its students, and desires to see them grow in Christ-like leadership. This commitment is more than simply supplying head knowledge, although it does include the virtues that accompany academic excellence. Thus, United exists to see transformation take place in the lives of those who desire to become ministers of the church through the preparation the school provides.

Unfortunately, not all who enter seminary are prepared for what is required to receive a master's degree. With the amount of writing that comes with earning a secondary degree, many feel overwhelmed, and some become confused about why they are even in seminary. This is particularly true for those who are in denominations like The United Methodist Church, which requires a Master of Divinity degree for ordination. One might wonder why sitting through classes and writing papers is a requirement, when all they really want to do is minister to others. This sense of vanity could end up leading to poor academic performance if one has no reason to care otherwise. More problematically, it can lead to doubting one's calling.

The education of clergy, however, has always been important to Methodism, whether it has been through formalized schooling, personalized study,

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<sup>72</sup> "Our Mission," United Theological Seminary, accessed July 29, 2022. <https://united.edu/vision-mission-values/>

apprenticeship, field education, or a combination of each. There is a purpose to the prescribed process, and that is that ministers would become thoroughly prepared for their ministry. The Writing Center at United serves to help struggling students in their academic endeavors become better-prepared ministers through their writing. Students, who come to United from all walks of life, must know how to write masters-level papers if they expect to succeed in their respective programs. It is therefore imperative that a preliminary writing course is offered to help incoming students understand the level of work required in seminary. Such a course would provide new and incoming students with the very basics of academic writing to help ensure the Christian formation and ministerial preparation the school promises to its students. It will also solidify one's time in seminary as more than an obstacle to one's calling, but rather, a time of preparation in which one is formed more fully in one's calling.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In order for United Theological Seminary to meet its stated mission to prepare faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ, professors often assign classwork in the form of academic papers. However, because many students are ill-prepared when entering seminary, they are often unsure of how to write proper academic papers that meet the standard the school expects. There are several reasons for this to be the case, but for some, a sense of purpose is lacking. The question on the mind of many students is, “If I am here to become a better minister, why must I write so many papers?” Naturally, the details of what goes into an academic paper will also be overlooked and likely regarded as unimportant.

To address this problem, this project created a preliminary orientation course, primarily targeting in-coming students involving a series of two to fifteen-minute videos covering writing fundamentals such as preparing a thesis, Turabian-style formatting, quotations, and formulating coherent paragraphs that are pertinent to one’s topic. This course was designed to help students know what to expect in their forthcoming workload, as they learn to write academically. However, those who do not have an understanding as to why God had called them into Seminary may have trouble adjusting without a sense of

purpose. Students with no sense of purpose or direction might find it difficult to keep up with schoolwork that may feel is equally as pointless.

For this reason, Bonaventure's theology of acquiring knowledge is foundational to the project. Bonaventure, an academic and cleric, was highly influential in both worlds and melded them together in the understanding that education is imperative to loving God more fully. All knowledge gained, when rightly aligned, should point back to Christ who gives true knowledge. This indicates that all work done in seminary is not self-serving but should guide one to love God with all one's mind.

Having been influenced by the brilliant minds of philosophers and theologians like Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Francis, and Alexander of Hales, as well as the words of scripture, Bonaventure wrote and taught extensively on many subjects. Perhaps the most he wrote about, though, was concerning true knowledge; what it is, where it comes from, how to attain it, and what purpose it serves for humanity. This chapter will examine the influencing factors of Bonaventure's life and observe his understanding of the pursuit of knowledge from a theological perspective. Understanding Bonaventure's theology of attaining true knowledge will give students a sense of purpose for their hard work in seminary when the goal is made clear that all effort put toward gaining knowledge, when correctly aligned with the purposes of God, is a work toward being Christlike. This is the reason for ministers of the Gospel to be properly educated on the things of God.



## The Life of St. Bonaventure

### *Early Life*

Giovanni di Fidanza, more commonly known as Bonaventure, was a Franciscan monk in the thirteenth century. Born in Bagnoregio, Italy, his young life was shaped by an experience of miraculous healing he attributed to the intercession of St. Francis of Assisi.<sup>1</sup> In Bonaventure's work titled, *The Life of Saint Francis*, he briefly recounts this event: "For when I was a boy, ... I was snatched from the jaws of death by his invocation and merits. So if I remained silent and did not sing his praises, I fear that I would be rightly accused of the crime of ingratitude. I recognize that God saved my life through him, and I realize that I have experienced his power in my very person."<sup>2</sup> For this reason, Bonaventure took up the task to write down his well-studied account of Francis' life. It is unknown whether or not Francis himself prayed for the young Bonaventure shortly before his own death, or if his family offered intercessory prayers through the recently canonized saint, but it is known that his family seems to have had a connection to the Franciscan order, likely through the convent in their hometown.<sup>3</sup> Many scholars note that beyond his healing, little else is known of his childhood.<sup>4</sup> However, that moment was such a strong force in Bonaventure's life that he molded much of his own theology around Francis'. He would even enter the Franciscan order himself, in 1243.

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Hammond, "St. Bonaventure," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, vol. 2, Baa-Cam (Detroit, MI: Gale, 2003), 479.

<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, "The Life of Saint Francis," in *Bonaventure*, trans. Ewert Cousins, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978). 182.

<sup>3</sup> Marianne Schlosser, "Bonaventure: Life and Works," in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, vol. 48, eds. Jay Hammond, Wayne Hellmann, and Jared Goff, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013). 9.

<sup>4</sup> Schlosser, "Bonaventure," *Bonaventure*, 9.

*Education, Profession, and Calling*

Bonaventure was educated at the University of Paris where he was taught by the English clergyman and Franciscan friar, Alexander of Hales, who held a chair of theology at the university.<sup>5</sup> Because of Alexander's leadership and influence, there was a growing presence of Franciscan friars. This helped to pave the way for the Franciscans to become an educated order. In his book, *The History of Theological Education*, Justo L. González points out that,

Saint Francis had not shown any great interest in academic studies, either for himself or for his followers, and therefore at the beginning those followers did not seek a place in the universities. But in 1236 the university professor Alexander of Hales became a Franciscan, and this was the first entry of the Order of Friars Minor into the University of Paris. Since then, ... the Franciscan presence in the university grew both in numbers and in prestige.<sup>6</sup>

During this surge of popularity among the Franciscans, Bonaventure became a student, and after five years, he would receive his license to teach. In 1253, he became master of the Franciscan school in Paris, and nearly five years afterward, he was elected as the minister general of the order.<sup>7</sup>

During this time, there was much disagreement between the seculars, or those teachers who did not belong to a monastic order, and the mendicants—monks who have taken vows of poverty, of which the two primary orders were that of the Franciscans and the Dominicans. It was the ideal of poverty that created a clash of values between the

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<sup>5</sup> Greg Peters, *The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015). 181.

<sup>6</sup> Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015). 48.

<sup>7</sup> Alban Butler, *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, New Full ed, vol. 7, July, rev. by Peter Doyle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000). 111.

mendicant orders and the seculars. Some of the secular faculty even considered this way of life to be heretical. Furthermore, jealousy over the success of the ministry of the mendicants also increased tensions. The success of the mendicant orders meant that more people were now paying indulgences to such orders, rather than the churches led by secular clergy.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the seculars believed it to be in their best interests to stifle the work and teachings of the mendicants. González states,

The presence of mendicants... among the university professors was not well received by many of their colleagues. Until that time, university teaching had been in the hands of diocesan clergy who had no vows of poverty, and many of these professors resented the emphasis of the mendicants on poverty, since it seemed to be an attack on their own lifestyle.<sup>9</sup>

Gert Melville adds,

In 1252, the professors there who were secular clergy sought to revoke the right that the Dominicans and Franciscans had won to occupy two teaching chairs each, insisting that each be granted only one. For the mendicant orders it was a call to arms that threatened the core of their existence, because their high standards of pastoral care required a university education. In this respect, the Franciscans had followed the lead of the Dominicans. To limit their access to study undermined their pastoral mission—but that was precisely the intention of their opponents.<sup>10</sup>

To counter the claims of the secular faculty, Bonaventure wrote *Evangelical Perfection*.

In this work, he argued that the mendicant orders were doing no more than following precepts that were plainly established in the gospel. Ultimately, the mendicants prevailed with the support of Pope Alexander IV in 1257. Bonaventure was now given credit as a doctor at the University of Paris, although this recognition was short-lived, as this was the

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<sup>8</sup> Gert Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism: Its History and Forms of Life*, trans. James D. Mixson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 289.

<sup>9</sup> González, *Education*, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Melville, *Monasticism*, 289-90.

year in which he became the minister general of the Franciscan order. He resigned as the chair of Theology to pursue his ministry.<sup>11</sup>

This move gave rise to new tensions. The Franciscan order was evolving, and this evolution created two primary factions: one of absolutists who believed that St. Francis' lifestyle of poverty was of primary importance to the order and must be strictly followed, and the other of moderate Franciscans who believed that poverty should be observed on a personal level, but that some shared possessions owned by the order itself were necessary for the sake of the ministry. As the leader of the movement, Bonaventure reasoned that the more moderate wing was more sensible, and "strongly opposed the more extreme Franciscans." Because of his work that created a radical shift in understanding, Bonaventure became known by some as the order's "second founder."<sup>12</sup> Not everyone agreed with Bonaventure's interpretation of St. Francis' intentions. Nevertheless, his biography on the saint became the official biography of St. Francis. According to *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, the writer suggests that Bonaventure's influence made the Franciscan order practicable and was able to show "in his own life how the simplicity, frugal poverty, and personal imitation of Christ preached by St Francis could be combined with intellectual eminence, great learning, and holding of high office."<sup>13</sup> St. Francis himself seemed to have no interest in such intellectual endeavors for his order. Even regarding the study of scripture, Francis believed that it was more beneficial to study to gain

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<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, *Great Christian Thinkers: From the Early Church Through the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 258-59.

<sup>12</sup> Justo González, "Bonaventure (1221-74)," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 59.

<sup>13</sup> Butler, *Lives*, 111-12.

knowledge for correct Christian praxis and formation, rather than for collecting knowledge for knowledge's sake. Bonaventure writes,

Being once asked by the brethren whether it was his pleasure that learned men who entered his Order should apply themselves to the study of the Holy Scriptures, he replied, "Assuredly it pleases me that while they follow the example of Christ, of whom we read that He gave Himself more to prayer than to reading, they should not, on that account, neglect the study of prayer. Nevertheless, I would not have them study in order to know how they ought to speak, but in order that they may do the things which they hear and when they have done them, that they may set them before others. I would... have my friars to be disciples of the Gospel, and so to increase in the knowledge of the truth, that they may grow, at the same time, in purity and simplicity, so that they may not separate from the wisdom of the serpent the simplicity of the dove, which our Divine Master joined together with His blessed mouth."<sup>14</sup>

St. Francis never condemned learning outright. He simply believed that for the sake of the integrity of his order, intellectual pursuits could veer into categories of vanity and pride.<sup>15</sup> Francis was therefore cautious and did not at all desire the laity of the Order to seek instruction, mostly to avoid vanity. Bonaventure, on the other hand, had a mind pointed toward learning. In her book, *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought*, Margaret R. Miles writes that Bonaventure reasoned, that if the laity themselves did not desire education, they could instead receive it "by order of their superiors," this way, "not only would they not be breaking the rule by receiving instruction, but they would actually be strictly bound to do so."<sup>16</sup> With Bonaventure's interpretation of

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<sup>14</sup> Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, ed. Henry Edward Manning (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1988) 101-02.

<sup>15</sup> Étienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, trans. Dom Illtyd Trethowan and F. J. Sheed, Cluny Media ed. (Providence, RI: Cluny, 2020), 34.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 162.

Francis' understanding of seeking education, the Franciscans soon became known for their intellectual fervor.

### *Educational Formation of the Franciscans*

Many factors pressured the Franciscans to become a learned order. Among those was the desire to not appear to be somewhat lesser than the intellectually established order of the Dominicans. Another element is that they believed a higher level of education would provide a noticeable difference in preaching between themselves and heretics. In his book, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, Étienne Gilson adds that “All these influences combined to produce a learned Order which St. Francis of Assisi had not desired, but whose admirable development had decided St. Bonaventure to wear the Franciscan habit.”<sup>17</sup> By 1260, as minister general of the increasingly growing order, Bonaventure limited the admission of those wishing to join the Franciscans to educated clergy and esteemed laity. F. Donald Logan writes in his book, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*,

Both Francis and Bonaventure... each had a different view of the Franciscan vocation. Contemporaries universally praised the personal saintliness of Bonaventure, particularly his attachment to a simple life of poverty, even in the midst of the great university. He recognized that the order had changed, but, he said, so had the church changed in accidental ways while remaining consistently true to its essential self.<sup>18</sup>

Bonaventure maintained that though the Franciscan order was a bit different from how it started out under its founder, the heart of the ministry and the importance of simplicity remained the same.

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<sup>17</sup> Gilson, *Philosophy*, 36.

<sup>18</sup> F. Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2002), 218.

### *Later Years*

Throughout the rest of Bonaventure's life, the academic and religious challenges remained constant. In 1268, the pro-Franciscan pope, Clement IV, died. With no protection by a papal authority, the seculars at the University of Paris again went after the mendicant orders. At the same time, many of the seculars had embraced a new understanding of Aristotelian philosophy, and its influence had a remarkable impact on education.<sup>19</sup> Aristotle's philosophy was primarily based on the observations one could experience in the natural world, and thus could lay out "the conceptual possibility of analyzing the world without any reference to God."<sup>20</sup> Philosophy alone was sufficient for all knowledge. Aristotle did believe in a God of sorts, but his understanding of God is that of the unmoved mover, or prime mover, from whom all things put into motion originate. In his thinking, it is impossible that the chain reaction of cause and effect is rooted in eternity, with no original cause.<sup>21</sup> God, then, is the unmoved mover—the eternal being who was the first cause of every action. This God, an active, unmovable, eternal, and pre-existing being, set into motion all formless, passive, moveable, elements to create

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<sup>19</sup> Although Bonaventure, traditionally, has been depicted as a strong critic of the Aristotelian philosophy of his day, Franzisca van Buren makes a noteworthy case that Bonaventure actually may have been more inspired by and in agreement with Aristotle than what has historically been thought. For more information, see Franzisca van Buren, *Aristotle and the Ontology of Saint Bonaventure*, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy 1 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Miles, *Word*, 166.

<sup>21</sup> G. R. Evans, *Philosophy & Theology in the Middle Ages* (London, UK: Routledge, 1993), 74

the material world. The elements of the substance of creation itself, like Aristotle's God, are also eternal and pre-existing. The world, therefore, when reduced to its causal hierarchy of formless elements before the action of the unmoved mover, is also eternal. Though Bonaventure could agree that there is a causal hierarchy, he vehemently disagreed with the Aristotelian notion that the world is eternal. Traditional Christian teaching, from an Augustinian standpoint (to which Bonaventure agreed), indicates that God formed the world from nothing; *creatio ex nihilo*. Furthermore, the God conceived of by Aristotle has no need for any form of relationship with His creation. Gilson explains, "His God knows only Himself, and needs not to know things other than Himself. He does not even need to know them in order to move them, for He does not act upon them as efficient cause, but moves them only as final cause, as object of their desire and love."<sup>22</sup> With no conceivable relationship with such a God, the notion of the afterlife is rendered moot. For Bonaventure, however, it was essential to the Christian faith that all things ultimately reduce to Christ as the "Center of reality."<sup>23</sup> Philosophy, therefore, can be useful, but it can never be self-sufficient. The primacy of Christ must be taught in the university.

Between 1267 and 1270, Gerard of Abbeville, a secular professor of theology at the University of Paris and a prominent voice of support for Aristotelianism, began to speak against the mendicant orders, which had already been deemed by a previous pope as legitimate and necessary ministries. As the general minister of the Franciscans, Bonaventure understood that he had a duty to stand against the attacks directed toward

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<sup>22</sup> Gilson, *Philosophy*, 79.

<sup>23</sup> Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure*, (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1981), 212-13.



the mendicants once again, and publicly repudiate the aspirations and teachings of Gerard. At the same time, he continued to write against Aristotelianism as a self-sufficient philosophy. Bonaventure focused on clarifying the beliefs of his order, “but even more imperatively, ... defend[ed] the very orthodoxy of the theological studies in the university.” Ultimately, Bonaventure’s work led to the condemnation of the teachings of the secular masters by the end of 1270.<sup>24</sup> In 1271, after a lengthy election process, the pro-Franciscan, Gregory X, was chosen to become the new pope. Bonaventure was significantly influential in his election.<sup>25</sup>

In 1273, in gratitude for his election, Pope Gregory X nominated Bonaventure as the cardinal of Albano. He was strongly urged to accept this nomination.<sup>26</sup> After 17 years of service as the minister general of the Franciscans, Bonaventure resigned, and he was consecrated at Lyon by the pope. However, that same year, while still attending the same council, Bonaventure fell ill. His sickness lasted for several weeks until his death on the morning of July 15, 1274.<sup>27</sup> Under Pope Sixtus IV in 1482, Bonaventure was declared a saint. Slightly over a century later, he was named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Sixtus V.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jacques Guy Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1964), 128.

<sup>25</sup> Butler, *Lives*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> Bonaventure had once before been offered a roll as the archbishop of York by Pope Clement IV but declined due to his commitment to the Franciscan Order at the University of Paris. Butler, *Lives*, 112.

<sup>27</sup> Hammond, “Bonaventure,” *Encyclopedia*, 484.

<sup>28</sup> Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint*, Mystical Opuscula I, trans. José de Vinck (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1960), x.

## **Bonaventure's Theology of Seeking Higher Knowledge**

### *The Nature of Knowledge*

Saint Bonaventure held the education of his order in high regard. The Franciscan Order did not necessarily begin with this mentality. Saint Francis of Assisi had somewhat of a distaste for the overeducation of both laity and clergy, believing education to bring a false sense of superiority. Despite this, under Bonaventure's leadership, the Franciscan order became an intellectual powerhouse, turning out some of Christianity's most formidable minds such as Bonaventure himself, John Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon, and William of Ockham. The Franciscans were introduced to the University of Paris when a member of the theology faculty, Alexander of Hales, joined the order in 1236. When Bonaventure began attending the University of Paris, he was a student of Alexander's. As a result, Bonaventure was highly influenced by Alexander, who guided him in the scholastic method. Thus, Bonaventure had a mind naturally inclined toward academics.

However, for Bonaventure, education was a means to an end, and not the end itself. Having been formed in the Franciscan way, he recognized that education could easily become a stumbling block of vanity. However, Bonaventure believed that if used in the right spirit, schooling could be a powerful tool in the quest to loving God more fully. Knowledge, after all, is a gift bestowed by God. González writes, "Bonaventure simply wishes to reaffirm... that all true knowledge comes from Christ and that the function of the human teacher is not to teach, but rather to point to the inner knowledge that Christ gives."<sup>29</sup> Bonaventure was not alone in his thinking. This was the inspiration

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<sup>29</sup> González, *Education*, 50.

of Augustine's own theology of the nature of knowledge. In his work, *The Teacher*, Augustine reasons,

But as for all those things which we "understand," it is... the truth which presides over the mind itself from within.... Now He who is consulted and who is said to "dwell in the inner man," He it is who teaches us, namely, Christ, that is to say, "the unchangeable Power of God and everlasting wisdom." This is the Wisdom which every rational soul does indeed consult, but it reveals itself to each according to his capacity to grasp it by reason of the good or evil dispositions of his will.<sup>30</sup>

For Augustine, it is imperative that knowledge is linked to truth, and that truth be grounded in that which is immutable and eternal. He states,

After all, can anyone teach us, other than stable Truth? When some changeable creature advises us, we are but led to that stable Truth, where we truly learn as we stand still and listen to him, and are filled with joy on hearing the Bridegroom's voice, and surrender ourselves once more to him from whom we came. He is the Beginning for us in the sense that if he were not abidingly the same, we should have nowhere to return to after going astray. When we turn back from our errant ways it is by acknowledging the truth that we turn back, and he it is who teaches us to acknowledge it, because he is the Beginning who speaks to us.<sup>31</sup>

The pursuit of knowledge is the pursuit of truth. The pursuit of truth brings the thinking person to Christ, through whom all things were made, whose light provides illumination for all knowledge.

Such an understanding of the nature of knowledge resonated with Bonaventure, who often appealed to the authority of Augustine in light of several influential philosophical movements within the medieval era.<sup>32</sup> According to Joshua C. Benson,

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<sup>30</sup> Augustine, "The Teacher," in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 59, St. Augustine: The Teacher, Free Choice of the Will, Grace and Free Will, trans. Robert P. Russell (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968). 51.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012). 291-92.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure*, Great Medieval Thinkers (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006). 8.

Bonaventure viewed Augustine as a man informed by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, uniquely placed between the biblical heroes of Moses and Paul, and the influential pagan philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. Benson writes,

Augustine stands between and above Plato and Aristotle, to whom the Holy Spirit gave the light of both philosophers.... [W]hat we *might accord* to these two Pagan philosophers—wisdom and science—the Spirit *did grant* to Augustine. ... Higher in Bonaventure's academy stand the great doctors of the Old and New law [Moses and Paul]. Over them all must rise the sun that gives them light: Christ, the law giver, the perfect man of knowledge, the one and only master and doctor. Augustine could not be placed in greater company and though his role is less than the scriptural figures and more than the classical ones, he stands alone.<sup>33</sup>

Plato and Aristotle, in other words, had been given special knowledge that had been illuminated to them by the Holy Spirit. Even greater was the illumination given by the Holy Spirit to Moses and Paul. Augustine had drawn inspiration from all these individuals, and as a Christian, had a higher standing in Bonaventure's mind than the philosophers, but a lower standing than the "great doctors of the Old and New law." What made Augustine great was not his philosophy, but his Spirit-given ability to properly exegete.<sup>34</sup> The philosophers were unaware of where their knowledge derived. Augustine, in company with Moses and Paul, knew his special knowledge came from God. For this reason, Bonaventure looked to Augustine as an authority of knowledge, though more flawed than the authority of knowledge found in scripture. Through it all, and most importantly, is the source of this knowledge. The one who brings illumination: Christ.

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<sup>33</sup> Joshua C. Benson, "Augustine and Bonaventure," in *T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology*, ed. C.C. Pecknold and Tarmo Toom (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 149-50. Italics in original.

<sup>34</sup> Benson, "Augustine," *Companion*, 150.

### *Illumination*

The way in which illumination is given to humanity is inherent in all people, as all people are created in the image of God. All humanity, then, has an innate knowledge of truth to some degree. In this understanding, Bonaventure attempts to pull the philosophical epistemologies of Aristotle and Augustine together in order to create a fuller understanding of illumination. Aristotle taught that the basis of knowledge for humanity is found through the senses; what one can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, and experience. No knowledge is innate. This means that one cannot have knowledge of anything without some kind of sensational encounter. Augustine, who was influenced by the Neoplatonism of his time, insisted upon a more mystical origin for knowledge. Plato believed that knowledge concerned the essences of all things. These essences are eternal, changeless, and formless, and thus, cannot be known through limited sense perceptions. All things that are physical and temporal are bound by natural limitations, and are therefore, not as real and true as their essences. The key to true knowledge, then, for Plato, is the remembering of the timeless truths of the essences that are already innate within the soul's memory, the soul having already experienced these truths in a former life.

Augustine's thought is notably ambiguous, though he took inspiration from Plato's understanding of innatism, theorizing that all knowledge is derived from the knowledge of God. Lydia Schumacher says in her book, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*, "... the light is the source of a set of innate ideas for all things from ordinary objects to abstract concepts like goodness, truth, beauty, and justice. Following Plato, Augustine apparently held these ideas (ultimately

located in the mind of God) to be essential to human knowing....”<sup>35</sup> As Plato believed that all things have an eternal essence from an eternal source, and can be knowable to humanity through remembering a past life, Augustine’s thought seems to be that all things have their beginning in God, the eternal source, and can thus be known fully in him. The individual, who is created in the image of God, has divine truth innate within. Schumacher says that this idea is “the sign of Christ’s presence in the mind. To make use of [innate truth] is to come under the influence of His continuous illumination, which saves human knowledge from skepticism.”<sup>36</sup> True knowledge, then, is discovered beyond the senses and emerges from the knowledge of Christ—the foundation of truth itself—who illuminates the mind of a person to know the truth.<sup>37</sup>

Bonaventure’s understanding of illumination suggests that human minds are fallen, and the things that can be observed through the senses are temporal and changeable. Divine illumination, then, is necessary for human beings to understand the eternal and unchangeable truths of the things observed. In other words, God’s light reveals the full truth of things that could otherwise only be known in part by humans.<sup>38</sup> In this, Bonaventure attempts to reconcile the views of Aristotle and Augustine by suggesting that they must combine. Bringing these two together, Bonaventure reasons that the mind is doubly aligned: “one external through the senses, and the other internal

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<sup>35</sup> Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge*, eds. Gareth Jones and Lewis Ayres *Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Schumacher, *Divine*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Justo González, *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, vol. 2, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 245.

<sup>38</sup> Schumacher, *Divine*, 10.

through illumination.”<sup>39</sup> The mind relies on this double alignment to discover divine truth. J.M. Hammond says in his writing on Bonaventure,

On the external level, the mind can turn outward to the macrocosm of the world and receive innumerable data from the senses. However, not all that is in the intellect is first in the senses. Rather, on the internal level, the mind can turn inward into itself, the microcosm, and discover itself as an image of God, and arrive at certitude through “full analysis” by reducing all knowledge to elementary principles found in the divine Ideas. ...[S]ince the mind is the image of God, all external sense knowledge can be illumined by the “light” of the divine Ideas that are internally present to the mind.<sup>40</sup>

Because all things were created by the Word of God, all things can be known in two ways: both through the senses and through the illumination of God. God, in turn, can also be recognized in created things through the senses, illumined by the *Logos*, God’s Word.

Bonaventure says it this way:

Whoever, therefore, is not enlightened by such splendor of created things is blind; whoever is now awakened by such outcries is deaf; whoever does not praise God because of all these effects is dumb; whoever does not discover the First Principle from such clear signs is a fool. Therefore, open your eyes, alter the ears of your spirit, open your lips and *apply your heart* so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise, love and worship, glorify and honor your God lest the whole world rise against you. For because of this *the whole world will fight against the foolish*. On the contrary, it will be a matter of glory for the wise, who can say with the Prophet: *You have gladdened me, Lord, by your deeds and in the works of your hands I will rejoice. How great are your works, Lord! You have made all things in wisdom; the earth is filled with your creatures.*<sup>41</sup>

To fully experience, then, is to fully know through the senses and by illumination. To fully know is to see the *Logos* in creation through the *Logos* Himself. Therefore, the

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<sup>39</sup> Hammond, “Bonaventure,” *Encyclopedia*, 489.

<sup>40</sup> Hammond, “Bonaventure,” *Encyclopedia*, 489.

<sup>41</sup> Bonaventure, “The Soul’s Journey into God,” in *Bonaventure*, trans. Ewert Cousins, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978). 67-8. Italics in original.

experience of the senses and the illumination of God in creation should lead one to praise God as the Creator.

### *The Christocentricity of Knowledge*

The Triune nature of God is of utmost importance to Bonaventure's theology. Nature itself testifies to the Godhead. As there exists one God in three persons, among the diversity of created beings is the singular unity of creation itself. This unity is the created, finite, universe that must have had its beginning by a singularity that reflects the highest qualities of goodness, wisdom, power, and perfection.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps most importantly is the idea of love. For God to exist, holding the highest qualities of all these, God must love. If God loves, and has loved for eternity, "it is necessary that He possess an intrinsic plurality for He has nothing outside Himself that is supremely lovable."<sup>43</sup> As elements of these attributes generally understood to be good are seen in nature, so too must they be conceived of in the highest terms. Thus, all that is created bears the imprint of the Triune God. To know God, then, is to know the Triune God who is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Likewise, to fully know creation is to recognize the imprint of the Triune creator.

Within his Trinitarian thought is the centrality of Christ, who is "properly the Image, the Word, and the Son." Bonaventure states that "'Image' designates him as expressed likeness, 'Word' as expressive likeness, and 'Son' as personal likeness. Again, 'Image' designates him as likeness in the order of form, 'Word' as likeness in the order

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<sup>42</sup> Bonaventure, "Disputed Questions on the Nature of the Trinity," in *Readings in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Andrew B. Schoedinger (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 327.

<sup>43</sup> Bonaventure, "Disputed," *Readings*. 331.



of reason, and ‘Son’ as likeness in the order of nature.”<sup>44</sup> The very nature of Christ is at the center of Bonaventure’s theology. Scripture says that all things are made through the Word of God, who is Christ.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, all things can be known through Christ who “holds the divine and created orders together.”<sup>46</sup> Fully God and fully human, Christ is the one who bridges the eternal, perfect, and uncreated to the temporal, fallen, and created. All knowledge, then, is rooted in Christ.

Knowledge for the sake of knowledge, then, is no knowledge at all; it is worthless in Bonaventure’s mind, because it does not recognize the centrality of Christ. As true knowledge is rooted in Christ, it also reflects Christ. Accordingly, theology is practical for the Christian life because of its sapiential fruits. To contemplate God is a pure form of knowing, by which one grows in the complete love of God. Reflecting on St. Bonaventure, Pope Benedict XVI says in his book, *Great Christian Thinkers: From the Early Church Through the Middle Ages*, “One who loves wants to... be better acquainted with the beloved: this is the fundamental intention of theology. Thus, in the end, for St. Bonaventure, the primacy of love is crucial.”<sup>47</sup> If the Word, who is the expressive likeness of God, is the one through whom one is able to attain true knowledge, then one may find completion in his love. Just as well, one can develop an understanding that to know God is to receive his knowledge and love. Bonaventure confirms this when speaking of scripture’s role in guiding the believer in wisdom:

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<sup>44</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, “Bonaventure Texts in Translation Series,” vol. 4, trans. Dominic V. Monti (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005), 36.

<sup>45</sup> Jn. 1:1-5, 9-18. All scripture taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

<sup>46</sup> Hammond, “Bonaventure,” *Encyclopedia*, 484-85.

<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, *Thinkers*, 266.

...[W]e must reach out in true faith to *the Father of lights*, bending the knee of our hearts, so that through his Son and in the Holy Spirit, he might give us a true knowledge of Jesus Christ, and together with his knowledge, love for him. Thus, by knowing and loving Christ, by being confirmed in faith and *rooted in love*, we may be able to know *the breadth, length, height and depth* of that same Holy Scripture, and through such knowledge attain the all-surpassing knowledge and measureless love of the Blessed Trinity.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, to be acquainted with God is to seek his love and knowledge through his Word, which are all actually one and the same. It is Christ the Word, who is the expressed likeness of God and bridges the divine and created, who holds the knowledge and love of God. As the bridge and as the holder, it is through Christ that humanity can access these attributes that are the very nature of who God is. The purpose of attaining his knowledge, then, is to attain his likeness.

This is no small matter for Bonaventure, and it is why theology must begin where philosophy leaves off. Bonaventure, believing that philosophy is not self-sufficient, held that theology is a higher form of seeking knowledge because it considers God, in whom purpose is found. All true knowledge is illumined by the Word, and is, therefore, theology at its core.<sup>49</sup> Michael Robson writes on St. Bonaventure's understanding of the topic: "... theology is the only perfect wisdom. This is the point at which philosophical knowledge ends, whereas theology goes on to consider the supreme Cause, God, as the remedy of sin, the reward of merit, and the goal of human desires. Bonaventure concludes that all Christians should be aflame with longing to acquire this knowledge."<sup>50</sup> Theology, or seeking after the knowledge of God, is the motivation driving the Christian

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<sup>48</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 4-5. Italics in original.

<sup>49</sup> González, *Dictionary*, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Robson, "Saint Bonaventure," in *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 189.

to look more like Christ. It cannot be regarded as unimportant. Bonaventure even says in his *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*,

... the highest and noblest perfection cannot exist in this world unless that nature in which the seminal principles are present, and that nature in which the intellectual principles are present, and that nature in which the ideal principles are present are simultaneously brought together in the unity of one person, as was done in the incarnation of the Son of God. Therefore all natural philosophy, by reason of the relation of proportion, presupposes the Word of God as begotten and incarnate, the Alpha and the Omega, that is, begotten in the beginning before all time, and incarnate in the fulness of time.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, theology has a higher status in attaining knowledge than all else because it conceives of God who created all things through his Word and for his purpose. Not only does it conceive of God, it also seeks God.

Furthermore, all forms of knowledge, according to Bonaventure, are subservient to theology in the sense that, ultimately, the knowledge of God is hidden in them. For this reason, seeking knowledge of any form should not be done for vain purposes, but in order to glorify God. Bonaventure explains that “the fruit of all sciences,” is that “... faith may be strengthened, God may be honored, character may be formed, and consolation may be derived from union of the Spouse with the beloved, ... which takes place through charity..., and thus of every illumination descending from above, comes to rest... through the Holy Spirit who teaches us all the truth....”<sup>52</sup> Here, Bonaventure declares that illumination is a divine gift that finds its fulfillment when the true knowledge of God is sought after.

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<sup>51</sup> Bonaventure, “On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology,” *The Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Zachary Hayes (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1996), 57.

<sup>52</sup> Bonaventure, “Reduction,” *Works*, vol. 1, 61.

If true knowledge is to be attained, it must be understood that it is sourced from the Word. The Word is the knowledge of God, the Son, who is the second person of the Trinity and took on flesh to become human. So not only does the Word take the center place within the Trinity, he is also centrally located between God and creation as the mediator for humanity. Having made all things and being at the center of all things, all things can best be understood through him. In his *Collations on the Six Days*, Bonaventure states,

... John said: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him.* If, therefore, it is impossible to understand a creature except through that by which it was made, it is necessary that *the true Word go before thee.* ... [I]n Christ *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and ... He Himself is the central point of all understanding.*<sup>53</sup>

All things that were created serve a purpose in the created order. To have true knowledge of a created thing is to understand its created purpose. One is able to ascertain a thing's created purpose through the knowledge of the one who created it. The Word, through whom all things were created, being the knowledge of God, assigns the purpose of all created things. Therefore, knowing that Christ stands at the center of all provides one with insight into his divinity, but also, this insight guides one in his true wisdom to understanding all things created through him. If Christ, the mediator, is at the center of all understanding, true knowledge is made available to humanity. To conceptualize Christ in his rightful place is to put everything else in perspective around his centrality.

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<sup>53</sup> Bonaventure, "Collations on the Six Days," *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint*, vol 5, trans. José de Vinck (Patterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press), 6. Italics in original.

*Knowledge in “The Mind’s Road to God”*

Bonaventure believed that contemplation was the key to connect with God. In his work, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, he mentions that “for the soul to be instructed in the knowledge of God by interior conversation with the divine there is required a union with the one who is ‘the brightness of the divine glory and the image of the divine substance, upholding all things by the word of divine power.’”<sup>54</sup> Drawing inspiration from his hero, St. Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure developed a path of contemplation that he believed would allow one to connect with God in many meaningful ways. He called this *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, translated to be *The Mind’s Road into God*.<sup>55</sup>

In the later years of his life, St. Francis, in the splendor of contemplation on God, received the stigmata.<sup>56</sup> When this happened, Bonaventure records in his biography on St. Francis, a Seraph with six fiery and shining wings appeared before him. Between the wings was the image of a man who looked to have been crucified, “with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross. Two of the wings were lifted above his head, two were extended for flight and two covered his whole body.”<sup>57</sup> On the same mountain where Francis had this extraordinary encounter, Bonaventure too had a vision of the Seraph. He writes, “While looking upon this vision, I immediately saw that

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<sup>54</sup> Bonaventure, “Reduction,” *Works* vol. 1, 55.

<sup>55</sup> This work is translated in several different ways including *The Soul’s Journey into God*, and *The Journey of the Mind into God*.

<sup>56</sup> *Stigmata* is originally a Greek word that means “mark” or “spot.” The stigmata considered by many to be a blessing by which a person bears and displays the crucifixion marks of Christ on his or her body.

<sup>57</sup> Bonaventure, “Francis,” Bonaventure, 305.

it signified the suspension of our father himself in contemplation and the way by which he came to it.”<sup>58</sup> Bonaventure believed St. Francis to have been a man highly illuminated by the way of God. The vision of the Seraph revealed to him the way of contemplation by which St. Francis had been so illuminated that he was led to truly imitate Christ through his bearing the marks of his crucifixion on his own body.<sup>59</sup> What Bonaventure quickly understood was that each of the six wings stood as a symbol of the six ways by which the soul receives divine illumination. Each wing was a step higher in a process toward Christian knowledge. Before the Christian begins this ascent, however, he or she must first have the desire to love Christ. Such desire, according to Bonaventure, comes through prayer and contemplation. For this reason, he invites his readers to first pray before reading further. His warning is that to attempt to ascend without first praying and being open to conviction, would be to bring judgment on oneself.<sup>60</sup>

Contemplation invites the Christian to a deeper form of knowing God. Guigo II, a Carthusian monk and Christian mystic who lived in the century before Bonaventure, notes a difference between prayer and contemplation. Whereas “prayer is the heart’s devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good,”<sup>61</sup> contemplation leads the devotee to go further. Guigo states, “Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting

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<sup>58</sup> Bonaventure, *The Mind’s Road to God*, trans. George Boas (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 1953), 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 4-5.

<sup>61</sup> Guigo II, “The Ladder of Monks: A Letter on the Contemplative Life,” in “*Guigo II: Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations*,” vol. 48, Cistercian Studies Series, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), 68.

sweetness.”<sup>62</sup> Bonaventure himself agrees that such an ascent above oneself through divine means is the only way to attain the highest good.<sup>63</sup> For Bonaventure, then, prayer readies the heart and mind for an encounter with God, but contemplation is the means by which a unique encounter takes place. Both are necessary to develop the desire to love Christ more fully, preparing one for the journey to knowing God.

Bonaventure believes that the mind has a three-fold way of understanding: one of the body, one of the spirit, and one of the mind. The body comes to knowledge through the five primary senses, though, the knowledge of God by way of the senses is obscured due to creation’s fallen nature. The spirit gains knowledge by inwardly considering itself and within itself, where it reflects the image of God. The mind, then, acquires the wisdom of God above itself, “through His light, which has signed upon our minds the light of eternal Truth.”<sup>64</sup> Each wing of the Seraph expressed its symbolism to these ways of understanding. The first of these wings is mounted in the sensible, or the “body” aspect of the mind where it comes to knowledge through the senses. For this reason, it is one of two wings covering the feet of the Seraph. This first wing represents the first step of this journey of contemplation to recognize the traces of God in all created things.

Bonaventure says,

There shine forth... the Creator’s supreme power and wisdom and benevolence in created things, as the carnal sense reports trebly to the inner sense. For the carnal sense serves him who either understands rationally or believes faithfully or contemplates intellectually. Contemplating, it considers the actual existence of

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<sup>62</sup> Guigo II, “Ladder,” 68.

<sup>63</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 8, 34.

things; believing, it considers the habitual course of things; reasoning, it considers the potential excellence of things.<sup>65</sup>

Things that are being observed or experienced enter through the senses first to be understood in this three-fold manner of contemplation, belief, and reason. This first step is key for attaining a thing's information. When the senses encounter something from outside the self, discerning its goodness can take place.

When the senses detect the corporal world, the one seeking God should have the ability to see the traces of God in creation. That is, all created things share the same unity within the diversity of created things. This points to the triune nature of God. As this is observed, one is then moved to the second wing, again, covering the feet of the Seraph, as it is grounded in the corporeal. Here, the senses pick up other attributes that are seen at maximum within God. The senses are able to "apprehend" the traces of God in creation. Then, they can "delight" in them. Bonaventure says, "Sense... takes delight in an object perceived through an abstracted similitude either by reason of its beauty, as in sight; or by reason of its agreeableness, as in odor and hearing; or by reason of wholesomeness, as in taste and touch, speaking with appropriation."<sup>66</sup> In other words, to delight in something is to experience the goodness of God in it. This leads one to "judgment." Judgment gives an explanation as to why something brings delight. By doing so, Bonaventure explains that the thing bringing delight enters the "intellective faculty" through the senses, and by "purification and abstraction," it enters the human soul.<sup>67</sup> The soul is empowered to detect the traces of God that allows an object to bring delight. In his essay entitled,

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<sup>65</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 17.



“Bonaventure,” in the book, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, Gregory F. Lanave says, “... if we consider the delights that our souls find in the bodily senses, and their union with their desired object, we find an analogy to a spiritual delight in what is most truly beautiful, harmonious, and so on.” In this, one comes to understand in a physical and spiritual sense, a piece of the ultimate delight, which is the knowledge of God.<sup>68</sup> This idea that all things contain traces of God, Gilson calls, “universal analogy.” Regarding the perception of these traces as “shadows of the primary Being from whom they derive,” he says, “Now if we allow the light of faith to illumine our reason, with what richness will this distant shadow seem to us to be filled!”<sup>69</sup> Things are rightfully and correctly seen to be what they truly are when Christ provides the illumination of sanctified reason.

The third wing moves from the body to the spirit, where one is guided to self-contemplation. Thus, the third wing represents the contemplation of the image of God that has been stamped upon the “natural powers” of humanity. By this, Bonaventure indicates that humans have memory, intellect, and will—all of which reflect the image of God. Thus, for a person to know oneself is to know God. However, he argues that to know oneself, one must remember oneself, “for we receive nothing through intelligence which is not present to our memory.”<sup>70</sup> Memory “retains the past by recalling it, the present by receiving it, the future by foreseeing it.”<sup>71</sup> In this way, it mimics the eternal,

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<sup>68</sup> Gregory F. Lanave, “Bonaventure,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, eds. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 164.

<sup>69</sup> Gilson, *Philosophy*, 178.

<sup>70</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 22.

<sup>71</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 22.

and is, therefore, a trace of God. However, memory also can receive images from the corporeal world as well as the spiritual world. In addition, Bonaventure claims that the mind “has an undying light present to itself in which it remembers unchangeable truths.”<sup>72</sup> With these three attributes of memory alone, the soul is the image of God, and is therefore able to recognize, receive, and take part in God.

The intellect, on the other hand, understands through terms, propositions, and inferences. The fullness of terms is similar to Aristotle’s philosophy of the prime Mover. Bonaventure says, “... a definition must be made by higher terms and these by still higher, until one comes to the highest and most general, in ignorance of which the lower cannot be defined.”<sup>73</sup> This is God who is “the purest, most actual, most complete, and absolute Being.”<sup>74</sup> The image of God is found in the fact humans generally have a natural knowledge of the ultimate good in all cases. This inevitably will lead to the knowledge of God. The proposition of the intellect is the ability to hold knowledge and make claims of truth concerning the things perceived. If there is a truth, it is unchangeable as God is also unchangeable. Humans, however, have a mind that does change. Thus, the way to perceive an unchangeable truth is through the illumination of the unchangeable God who is eternally truth.<sup>75</sup> The intellect, then, makes inferences as it is able to logically draw conclusions. One can observe the world and draw from this observation the vestiges of God. Yet such a truth can only come from God.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 23.

<sup>74</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 25.

The third natural power is the ability to will. The will is marked by “deliberation,” which seeks to find what is best; “judgment,” which seeks the highest order; and “desire,” which seeks the highest good.<sup>77</sup> All of these are found in the triune God. Likewise, humanity, as a mirror, reflects this. Memory leads to knowledge, and memory and knowledge together bring about perfect love. Bonaventure details, “These three—the generating mind, the word, and love—are in the soul as memory, intelligence, and will, which are consubstantial, coequal, and coeval mutually immanent.”<sup>78</sup> When seeking the knowledge of God, then, one can examine one’s soul and see that the image of God is pressed into it.

The fourth wing is linked to the third and symbolizes the reformation of God’s image through divine gifts of grace. These are the middle wings that begin to lift off the ground in the ascent to God. It is noted in this step that because of the fall of humanity, attaining the knowledge of God is an insurmountable task for the human being alone. This is the reason Christ came. Bonaventure argues, “... however much anyone is illuminated only by the light of nature and of acquired science, he cannot enter into himself that he may delight in the Lord in himself, unless Christ be his mediator, Who says, ‘I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved; and he shall go in, and go out, and shall find pastures.’”<sup>79</sup> He continues, saying,

Therefore the soul which believes in, hopes in, and loves Jesus Christ, Who is the Word incarnate, uncreated, and spirated, that is, the way and the truth and the life, when by faith he believes in Christ as in the uncreated Word, which is the Word

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<sup>77</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 25.

<sup>78</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 26.

<sup>79</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 28.

and the splendor of the Father, he recovers spiritual hearing and vision: hearing to receive the lessons of Christ, vision to look upon the splendor of His light.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, when one puts full belief in the Word, Christ restores the broken function of all the spiritual senses that were ruined in the fall. By this, one is given the ability to attain the knowledge of God—the way that God desires humanity to live. It is no longer the flesh alone that can bear witness to Christ only in part through the senses, but the fullness of the Word is made available in the soul.

With Christ as the mediator, humanity can attain God through his perfection as he perfects the believer. To help one in this level of contemplation, scripture becomes crucial as it serves as a guide to purification, illumination, and perfection. The soul is then repaired and can seek higher elevation in contemplation.<sup>81</sup> Bonaventure says, “Our mind, filled with all these intellectual illuminations, is inhabited by the divine wisdom as the house of God.”<sup>82</sup> The soul becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit so that the things of God can be known by humankind.

Bonaventure then moves on to the third set of wings, which contains the fifth and sixth wings that are extended above the head of the seraph. This symbolizes going beyond the inner and outer self, and onto ascending above oneself. Contemplation of the things of God quenches the thirsty soul in such a way that it causes the one contemplating to forget the things of the world. Guigo II says, “... in... exalted contemplation all carnal motives are so conquered and drawn out of the soul that in no way is the flesh opposed to

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<sup>80</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 29.

<sup>81</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 31.

<sup>82</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 32.

the spirit, and man becomes, as it were, wholly spiritual.”<sup>83</sup> Likewise, Bonaventure says that the one on the journey to the knowledge of God, ascends above the things of this world in a spiritual rapture. In this fifth step, Bonaventure challenges the sojourner to contemplate God’s oneness through his name, which is “Being.” What he means by this is that God is total and complete being, as he tells Moses that his name is *YHWH*, or “I Am Who I Am.”<sup>84</sup> God is. Bonaventure argues that God is pure Being, and as Being, “cannot be thought not to be.”<sup>85</sup> Because Non-Being cannot be thought up without first thinking of Being, then pure Being must be divine as nothing can be thought of without it. Being is. Bonaventure writes, “...if God is the name of the primary, eternal, most simple, most actual, most perfect Being, it is impossible that He be thought of as not being nor as anything save One alone. ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one God.’ If you see this in the pure simplicity of your mind, you will somehow be infused with the illumination of eternal light.”<sup>86</sup> If God is Being, then God is Unity, and by this understanding, one may gain the light of God, and one can see by this light the Being that is God.

Moving on from the fifth wing to the sixth is the contemplation of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whose name is Good. The triune God must be the highest Good, and the highest Good must be three in nature, that it can love, be loved, and co-love from and for eternity. Love must have another in order to be effectual. The Father loves, as

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<sup>83</sup> Guigo, “Ladder,” 74.

<sup>84</sup> Exodus 3:13-14.

<sup>85</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 35.

<sup>86</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 37.

God is love, the Son is beloved, and the Holy Spirit is co-loved, thus the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are necessary.<sup>87</sup> Yet, to be the highest good, the Three must be One because God is Being, which is essentially unity. St. Bonaventure admits that though this must be the case, it is in fact incomprehensible. He therefore warns one against assuming that such a mystery can be fully comprehended.<sup>88</sup> Being and Goodness in the highest order gives one an eternity's worth of contemplation. Bonaventure says, "... we understand with greatest certitude that all these exist in the most Blessed Trinity if we raise our eyes to the goodness that excels all goodness."<sup>89</sup> He continues, saying,

Because they are substantially one, therefore it must be true that there is unity in essence and in form, in dignity and in eternity, in existence and illimitability. While therefore you consider these things on by one in themselves, you have a reason for contemplating the truth; when you compare them with one another, you have the wherewithal to hover in highest wonder; and therefore, that your mind may ascend in wonder to wonderful contemplation...<sup>90</sup>

The highest Good that is the Trinity can only be fully understood by faith illuminated by God. In the vastness that is this Three in One, exists the perfect being who mysteriously holds all things together eternally. There is always something to contemplate in the highest good, then, and in contemplation, one can go beyond oneself and attain the knowledge of God.

The Seraph is not Bonaventure's only illustration of his six steps toward the mind of God. He also compares the steps to the six days of creation in which humans are told to work. Therefore, the six steps are like a work to be done in order to attain the

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<sup>87</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 39-40.

<sup>88</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 40.

<sup>89</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 40.

<sup>90</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 41.

knowledge of God. There then exists a seventh day of rest. For Bonaventure, when one completes the six steps of the journey, one is invited to rest in a mystical elevated state of ecstasy in the mind of God. The journey is over. The destination has been reached and now the sojourner may rest. Yet Bonaventure reminds the reader again that reaching this point is not a simple task, therefore rest is rewarded for those who take on such work. He writes,

If you should ask how these things come about, question grace, not instruction; desire, not intellect; the cry of prayer, not pursuit of study; the spouse, not the teacher; God, not man; darkness, not clarity; not light, but the wholly flaming fire which will bear you aloft to God with fullest unction and burning affection. This fire is God, and the furnace of this fire leadeth Jerusalem; and Christ the man kindles it in the fervor of His burning Passion, which he alone truly perceives who says, "My soul rather chooseth hanging and my bones death." He who chooses this death can see God because this is indubitably true: "Man shall not see me and live." Let us then die and pass over into darkness; let us impose silence on cares, concupiscence, and phantasms; let us pass over with the crucified Christ from this world to the Father...<sup>91</sup>

The journey to the mind of God, then, is not about acquiring knowledge for the sake of knowledge. All earthly pursuits are rendered as vanity. Neither status, intelligence, wealth, power, nor wisdom will lead one to the complete knowledge of God.

Bonaventure himself, who was a highly educated man and made a life of educating others in theology, the truest way of seeking wisdom, realized that to ascend to the knowledge of God requires one to desire nothing but what can be found in Christ. One must be willing to choose death over anything but Christ. In fact, to choose Christ is to choose to participate in his crucifixion. In such a way, St. Francis was transported in a heavenly bliss of contemplation. Desiring nothing but God, he "passed over into God" and as a token of his experience, received the blessing of the stigmata. Bonaventure proclaims

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<sup>91</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 45.

Francis, then, as the “the example of perfect contemplation.”<sup>92</sup> Through the journey to the mind of God, like St. Francis, one can know what it is to experience unity in God through his true knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

St. Bonaventure gave all credit to Christ who guides a person to true knowledge in God. Justo González recounts a popular legend involving Bonaventure and his contemporary and fellow priest and teacher, St. Thomas Aquinas: “Thomas... asked him to show him the library from which his ample knowledge was derived[.] Bonaventure answered by showing him a crucifix.”<sup>93</sup> This likely fabled account nevertheless indicates Bonaventure’s desire to know all things only through Christ the mediator. Gaining knowledge is good, but it must be directed appropriately to Christ. And if so directed, it is a necessary part of the process of a holy perfection in the love of God.

For those entering into seminary, Bonaventure’s approach to attaining knowledge can be a useful reminder as to why they are coming to seminary. This can be especially useful to those who do not understand why God has called them to further their education. Bonaventure believed that seeking education is a highly important part of being a minister. Not for collecting knowledge for its own sake, but so that one can love God with all of one’s mind as Christians are commanded to do. To gain true knowledge of a thing or a topic is to find its true knowledge in Christ. This true knowledge is illuminated through knowing Christ, through whom and for whom all things were

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<sup>92</sup> Bonaventure, *Road*, 44.

<sup>93</sup> González, *Education*, 47.



created. Because of this, Bonaventure highly encouraged leaders within the Franciscan order to have their monks educated.

The purpose of seminary is to train in the arts of ministry and theology. At the same time, Christian formation ought to be taking place not only for one to become a better minister or theologian (though this is important), but also that one may become a better Christian. In his article, “Saint Bonaventure and the Future of Christian Education,” Kyle David Rapinchuk says,

... Bonaventure’s vision for education is that knowledge and the arts are directed beyond themselves to something transcendent—union with the Triune God. Consequently, education ought to form character, strengthen faith, and direct one back to God. Bonaventure does not eschew information. Rather, information and knowledge come as gifts from God, but gifts that must be received and returned to the source of all Truth, the Eternal *Logos*.<sup>94</sup>

In seminary, one will gain knowledge about holy scripture, Christian ethics, church history, polity, worship, theology, and doctrine, but ultimately, the goal is that these are the catalysts by which one can learn to love God more fully.

The project aims to help prepare students for the work that seminary will require from them. In order to succeed and get the most out of the education United is providing its students, it is important for the student to understand that though the amount of work may seem to be too much at times, and the expectation of the quality of the papers is often high, it is not simply to keep the students busy. It is not providing knowledge for the sake of knowledge. It is there to stretch them, increasing their knowledge of the things of God while preparing them for the spiritual growth that seminary can provide. In addition, while learning and growing in faith, students are also learning to think

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<sup>94</sup> Kyle David Rapinchuk, “Saint Bonaventure and the Future of Christian Education,” *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 26, no. 2 (2022): 141, doi:10.1177/20569971221086661.

theologically, which assists to expand a student's mind to ways of thinking the student may not have considered before. Bonaventure's theology of the purpose of acquiring knowledge is foundational to students entering into seminary as it provides direction, meaning, and aspiration. Students do not arrive at seminary accidentally, nor do they come solely to gain more knowledge. That would be a fruitless endeavor. The seminarian is called to seek the knowledge of God in a deeper, more profound way, that one can find the wholeness that God desires to provide. This devotion to God is the key to unlock the mind of Christ that can only come through wanting nothing more than to love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

For many seminary students, writing papers can be a challenge. Paper writing is not as simple as recording one's own thoughts and feelings. Especially when it comes to academic writing, the conditions become quite nuanced. The student must select a topic, find resources surrounding the topic, be sure the resources selected are considered scholarly, order the information collected, create an outline, and only then, begin to write. However, even when one begins to write, there is much more to bear in mind. Spelling and grammar might come easy for some, but not for others. There is also the issue of using the academic voice in academic writing, which will sound different than, say, writing a journal entry. Of course, keeping style in mind, one needs to also remember to be sure to follow the formatting guidelines required by the school. This would include whatever form of citation the school obligates its students to use. From there, the student must consider whether the thesis statement is clear or not, and if a proper conclusion follows the body of the paper.

In all, writing papers in seminary does not come easily for many. However, when a student comes to seminary, the expectation is that he or she will attain a master's degree. Master's degrees require master's-level work. The work, therefore, is challenging, but it is challenging by design. When professors assign a paper, it is to

challenge their students by having them write on a topic, sometimes pre-selected, sometimes chosen by the student, with a specific set of instructions to follow to determine what the student has been retaining in class. Through such assignments, students will encounter scholars who have also written on the topic. By the end, it is possible that the student might feel overworked, but at the same time, the student was going through a test in which the student will come out more knowledgeable.

For some, this might sound too mentally taxing. However, the purpose of seminary is to push students past their limits as they learn more about ministry, theology, pastoring, and Church history. This mental stretching helps students to think in new ways, helping them in their confidence, coherence, and their knowledge, and providing them with the necessary skills and tools in order that they may lead well in the church.

However, many students come to seminary ill-prepared to encounter the expectations put in place to bring the kind of formation seminaries ought to provide for their students. At United, there are a number of students who do not have the proficiency to write strong academic papers. Some have come to United with no understanding of how to write academically at all. This can lead some students to struggle to keep up with the workload throughout seminary, and for a few, it may also cause them to fail or give up. However, their time in seminary is not an accident, and God has called these students to attend for a reason. Because of this, United should do everything it can to ensure that susceptible students are not overlooked in their difficulties. It is, therefore, necessary for United to maintain a preliminary, uncredited orientation course in which new and incoming students can be given the basics of academic writing. Students who take this

course will be given the tools they need that they can use and develop as they go through seminary, preparing them to write strong academic papers.

In order for these tools to be developed, however, students must become aware of what academic writing is, what its purpose is, and how it will help them in their ministerial goals. It is, therefore, necessary to explore the practice of academic writing and how its strictures help to form students in discipline and knowledge. This chapter will first provide seminary students with a general definition for academic writing and what it does to help form students. After discussing what academic writing is and the formation it provides, the research will then examine the academic writing style made popular by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, that is commonly viewed by most institutions of higher learning to be the standard expectation from those seeking master's degrees. However, just because the use of the academic writing style is generally encouraged does not mean that it is without its problems. Thus, the research will then examine some of the challenges that seminaries and their students might encounter in their writing assignments. Such issues will highlight the necessity for a course to help students in their preparation for their seminary career. Finally, the chapter will consider the role of research and thinking theologically, and how these help to expand the minds of seminarians as they write their papers, leading them to become confident in the knowledge they acquire in their studies.

Overall, this analysis centered on the discipline of academic writing provides a strong framework on which the project has been developed. As they begin their studies, seminary students will find that they will be devoting a great deal of time and energy to developing and perfecting their academic writing skills. However, especially for novice

writers, having a basic understanding of academic writing will provide students who take this course with a foundation on which they can confidently move forward in their educational endeavors.

### **Academic Writing for Seminary Students**

Writing academic papers is essential for seminary education. Paper writing challenges students to think in new and different ways, and to articulate those thoughts in an organized, coherent manner. It is a way in which students can thoroughly express their knowledge on any given subject. However, though there are many forms of writing, many who come to seminary, for a number of reasons, have not been made familiar with academic writing. For instance, many seminary students are preachers and might be used to writing sermons rather than academic papers. This can be a source of confusion for some students. Students such as these might believe they excel at writing because of their ability to craft great sermons. That might be the case in that specific context. It is important to note, however, that the two styles of writing vary significantly in many ways. Writing a sermon is not the same as writing a research paper. For this reason, it is crucial that students become familiar with writing academically so that they can succeed in their educational goals.

Such an example illustrates the variety of needs among those who are learning to write at a basic academic level. In her article titled, “It’s Not Just About the Teaching: Integrating Basic Writing History and Theory in a Master’s Level Graduate Seminar,” Marcia Z. Buell points out that, “The various backgrounds of the graduate students point

to key differences in perceptions of who basic writers are and what they may need.”<sup>1</sup>

Differing educational experiences brought on by a variety of factors play a significant role in understanding how students have (or have not) learned the basics of writing. She goes on to say, “Basic Writing does not exist in an educational vacuum. It is part of the broader context of culture, and so exists within other cultural and political conflicts.”<sup>2</sup> This means that with so many factors at play, what might be considered “basic” to one person, may not seem to be basic to another. Even a person’s grasp of the English language can have a wide array of differentiations from another’s. What can be agreed upon, though, is that though basic writing is nuanced, those who are seeking degrees at the levels of higher education must be able to write at the academic level. Students may come to seminary with various backgrounds, but at the very least, they must be able to write an academic paper.

This might raise the question, “What is academic writing?” Although academic writing can take many different forms, the primary goal of each form is to transmit knowledge in writing. Generally speaking, in the case for seminaries, this is usually done by way of book reports, essays, and research papers. Academic writing, then, is a type of formal writing in which students or scholars engage with the thoughts and ideas of others. Diana Hacker explains it this way in her work, *A Writer’s Reference*, “Whatever the discipline, the goal of academic writing is to argue a thesis and support it with

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia Z. Buell, “It’s Not Just About the Teaching: Integrating Basic Writing History and Theory in a Master’s Level Graduate Seminar,” *Journal of Basic Writing* 37, no. 2 (Fall, 2018): 95, <https://doi.org/10.37514/jbw-j.2018.37.2.05>.

<sup>2</sup> Buell, “Teaching,” *Basic*, 97.

appropriate evidence.”<sup>3</sup> Academic writers enter into a conversation of sorts with scholars within particular fields of discipline to gather supportive evidence for the claims they are attempting to prove. Through research and in-depth study, the writer draws comparisons between what other scholars have said on the given matter. Dawn Atkinson, in the book, *Intermediate College Writing: Building and Practicing Mindful Writing Skills*, adds that the purpose of academic writing is actually to develop communication skills. She submits,

College writing, also called academic writing, is text produced in academia for academic readers, but the scope of this type of writing is actually much broader since college writing tasks are designed to teach students the critical reading, thinking, and writing skills they need to communicate effectively in university courses *and* in the workplace. To hone and practice these skills, university students typically undertake a variety of writing assignments in various courses while completing their degree requirements.<sup>4</sup>

The work done, then, plays an active role in the educational formation students hope to experience through their studies. The mind takes in information through a dialogue between learned scholars and professionals, helping to broaden one’s understanding in a given area. William Badke explains in his book, *Research Strategies: Finding Your Way through the Information Fog*, “For scholars, the active give and take of knowledge as it develops is the very essence of how it all works. It’s a conversation among participants who are all on a quest. They may not agree with one another, but that’s a part of the process. Scholarship is not static. It’s a conversation.”<sup>5</sup> The conversation is a filter

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<sup>3</sup> Diana Hacker, *A Writer’s Reference*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 57.

<sup>4</sup> Dawn Atkinson and Stacey Corbitt, *Intermediate College Writing: Building and Practicing Mindful Writing Skills* (Butte, MT: Montana Technological University, 2022), 7. <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/1193>. Italics in original.

<sup>5</sup> William Badke, *Research Strategies: Finding Your Way through the Information Fog*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2021), 40.



through which poor scholarship (or at least faulty ideas) is filtered out. The writer becomes a part of this conversation and gains a more well-rounded understanding of the topic on which he or she is writing. The gleanings from the conducted research are then written out in the writer's own voice, and the writer's understanding and own thoughts and ideas of the topic are displayed for another reader to engage.<sup>6</sup>

Writing can assuredly be a laborious task. Alfred Burns, author of the book *The Power of the Written Word: The Role of Literacy in the History of Western Civilization*, notes, "The activity of writing requires a continuous interplay between memory, the speech center, the visual, the audio, and the motor centers of the brain."<sup>7</sup> A person may put more effort into writing than what he or she might realize. Burns goes on to say "Literacy is much more than a means of communications. It is a tool for clarifying one's own thoughts. When you 'put your thoughts on paper,' you are able to analyze their logic, to follow their ramifications and consequences."<sup>8</sup> In other words, as the writer writes, there is a multisensory and cerebral cooperation at work, stretching and challenging the writer to gain more erudition in a specific topic. For example, if one were to write an academic paper on the effects of physical exercise on the mind, through one's research, careful study, and writing out one's thoughts and gleanings in an organized

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<sup>6</sup> Usually this "reader" in the case of seminary students is a teacher or professor. However, there is a generic "reader" the writer must keep in mind. Usually, the teacher of the subject is well-informed in the matter on which the student is writing, but the student should imagine that the paper is being written to someone who may not know the subject all that well.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Burns, *The Power of the Written Word: The Role of Literacy in the History of Western Civilization*, Studia Classica (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1989), 295.

<sup>8</sup> Burns, *Word*, 296.

manner, the work involved will reward the writer with better articulation and a much deeper comprehension of the subject.

### **The Style of Academic Writing**

Overall, academic writing is a process. When students are creating their first academic writing assignments, it is unlikely that they would turn out their best work. The skill to produce high-quality work will develop over time with practice. According to Andrew P. Johnson, in his book, *Academic Writing: Process and Product*, he asserts that academic writing can be thought of in three ways: as “an art, a science, and a craft.”<sup>9</sup> Each way indicates the writing as the creation of the writer. As an art, for example, it is the manifestation of the writer’s own expressed thoughts. Yet academic writing also has certain rules and styles that must be followed to reach a desired result, making it a science. It is a craft in that it is a skill that builds through practice.<sup>10</sup> To master these areas requires time and attention. When students enter into the process of academic writing, the work will eventually become clearer, more concise, and thoughtful, thus showing a stronger comprehension of the material. The style in which a person writes will often communicate the clarity of the author’s understanding. For this reason, the writer ought to write in a way that is formal and precise.

For some writers, there is a temptation to write in an ornate, fanciful way, filled with colloquialisms, alliterations, and other embellishments that may make the writer’s voice stand out uniquely among others. For the most part, such enhancements are seen as

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew P. Johnson, *Academic Writing: Process and Product* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), xi.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Academic*, xii.

unnecessary and extraneous, as they tend to lead the reader not to focus on the topic, but on the artistry of the writer. Though writing is assuredly an art, as Johnson described, being a science, academic writing requires precision over extravagance. William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White say in their book, *The Elements of Style*,

Young writers often suppose that style is a garnish for the meat of prose, a sauce by which a dull dish is made palatable. Style has no such separate entity; it is nondetachable, unfilterable. The beginner should approach style warily, realizing that it is an expression of self, and should turn resolutely away from all devices that are popularly believed to indicate style—all mannerisms, tricks, adornments. The approach to style is by way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity.<sup>11</sup>

This is not to say that there never is a place in academic writing for adornment, but rather, one ought to be cautious of the possibility of detraction. A straight-forward, matter-of-fact approach usually offers the best clarity. However, Helen Sword, author of *Stylish Academic Writing*, sees things differently:

... [T]he fundamental principles of stylish academic writing can indeed be described, emulated, and taught. Perhaps the most important of those principles is self-determination: the stylish writer's deeply held belief that academic writing, like academic thought, should not be constrained by the boundaries of convention. ...[M]any writers lack the confidence to break away from what they perceive—often mistakenly—as the ironclad rules of their disciplinary discourses.<sup>12</sup>

For Sword, the traditional standards and strictures of academic writing are outdated and constraining. They are held in place, mostly, by conformity to the established academic practice. Writers like Ken Hyland point out that because of the conversational nature of academic writing, it might be in the best interest of the writer to take a laxer, and somewhat, less formal approach. In his book, *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing*, Hyland observes,

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<sup>11</sup> William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 69.

<sup>12</sup> Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 11.

We have to remember that writing and speaking, acts of meaning-making, are never neutral but always *engaged* in that they realize the interests, the positions, the perspectives and the values of those who enact them. Those that *articulate* meaning must therefore consider its social impact, the effect it has on those who interpret the meaning, the readers or hearers who at that moment constitute an *audience* for the communication. Metadiscourse is one of the main means by which this is accomplished, involving writers/speakers and their audiences in mutual acts of comprehension and involvement.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, in order to be more engaging, the writer ought to remember that the reader is human, complete with thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and not an obscure, disembodied observer, indifferent to passionate writing. Hyland uses the term “metadiscourse” to refer to the idea “... that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goods or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating.”<sup>14</sup> Because academic writing is, at its core, a communication of knowledge to another, one should be aware of the living, breathing person who will be reading the work.

Hyland and Sword are examples of scholars in the field of academic writing who wish to see more personality in the papers of students and peers. However, as White says in *The Elements of Style*, “All writers, by the way they use language, reveal something of their spirits, their habits, their capacities, and their biases. ... All writing is communication; creative writing communication through revelation—it is the Self escaping into the open. No writer long remains incognito.”<sup>15</sup> The idea is, even with specific rules in place for the sake of brevity and clarity, a writer’s personality will still

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<sup>13</sup> Ken Hyland, *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 4-5. Italics in original.

<sup>14</sup> Hyland, *Metadiscourse*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Strunk and White, *Elements*, 67.

be seen in the writing. Prolific author, Stephen King, for example, praises *The Elements of Style*, saying, “Strunk and White offer the best tools (and the best rules) you could hope for, describing them simply and clearly.”<sup>16</sup> Given the substantial reputation Stephen King has been given as an author, for him to endorse *The Elements of Style* as “the best” of writing standards, is perhaps a significant affirmation of the style among writers.

Even with its critics, *The Elements of Style* is still relevant for those writing in academic settings. White even notes in the book’s introduction that some rules are “somewhat a matter of individual preference, and even the established rules of grammar are open to challenge.”<sup>17</sup> He admits, “There is no satisfactory explanation of style, no infallible guide to good writing, no assurance that a person who thinks clearly will be able to write clearly, no key that unlocks the door, no inflexible rule by which writers may shape their course. Writers will often find themselves steering by stars that are disturbingly in motion.”<sup>18</sup> The purpose of the guidelines laid out by Strunk and White are not to diminish imagination or stifle creativity. Rather, they exist as a set of standards for the sake of “cleanliness, accuracy, and brevity in the use of English.”<sup>19</sup> Such recommendations provide a quality of readability—a degree of excellence academic writers should set out to achieve.

The rules, initially written down by Strunk, included fundamentals such as the proper use of commas, apostrophes, colons, semicolons, and dashes, as well as parts of

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Scribner, 2020), 129.

<sup>17</sup> Strunk and White, *Elements*, xvii.

<sup>18</sup> Strunk and White, *Elements*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Strunk and White, *Elements*, xiii.

speech like verbs and pronouns. However, Strunk also included some elements that could be easily overlooked by some. For example, he encourages using the active voice, rather than the passive. He also suggests putting sentences in positive form. One example used in the text is, “He was not very often on time.” Strunk believes that changing such a sentence to “He usually came late” provides more clarity.<sup>20</sup> As White later expresses, such rules can be a matter of personal preference, but these types of strictures formulate a specific style that is generally used in academic writing. Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson refer to this style as “Research English.”<sup>21</sup>

Research English is a form of written communication by which a writer’s research is expressed in formal academic papers. It is designed to be “simple, concise, and clear...” as well as “concrete, impersonal, objective, formal, dignified, factual, and unbiased.”<sup>22</sup> These features work to the writer’s intelligibility and precision, helping the writer to carefully demonstrate well-researched, cohesively arranged, and thoughtful arguments. Vyhmeister and Roberston highly encourage the use of Research English in order for the writer to provide the best work possible (though some academic writers believe the word “best” to be subjective, and its use is indeed discouraged). The following are suggestions by Vyhmeister and Robertson, with some explanation, to help the writer reach the degree of academic excellence that is often expected for paper writing:

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<sup>20</sup> Strunk and White, *Elements*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 195.

<sup>22</sup> Vyhmeister and Robertson, *Quality*, 195.

1. Use impersonal language. The uses of first-person pronouns may guide the reader to focus on the personal views of the writer rather than the topic being argued.
2. Refrain from the use of similes, metaphors, and idioms, as well as comparative words and phrases. They also advise against the use of exclamation marks. These emotive writing devices might be used (possibly unconsciously) to distort facts when the writer provides little to support an argument.
3. Do not overstate by using adverbs of frequency. In general, one should not assume if things are “always” the case, if “all” people believe a certain thing, or if something “never” happens. These words may sometimes lead to inaccurate statements.
4. Avoid using subjective adjectives and adverbs. For example, what one person might consider “astounding,” another may find it to be “uninspiring.”
5. Be specific. An academic writer has plenty of room for creativity. This can be expressed through specificity. “Stuff,” for instance, is widely considered to be a weak word. Instead, the writer can qualify “stuff.” Goods, items, belongings, and material can all be adequate words to use depending on the context. The writer can even describe what is meant by “stuff” more thoroughly.
6. Use the full forms of words rather than contractions. i.e., do not, rather than don’t.
7. Refrain from colloquialisms, clichés, and slang. These words and phrases are often inexact, lead to stereotypes, and can be viewed as lazy. For example,

instead of saying, “It’s crazy! She gave an arm and a leg to that charity. It’s like she’s made of money!”, the writer can say, “Though some may find it difficult to believe, the wealthy woman was able to give generously to the charity.”

8. Write inclusively. Instead of saying “mankind,” a word like “humanity” would work just as well.<sup>23</sup>

Like Strunk and White, guidelines by Vyhmeister and Robertson serve to assist the writer in effective communication. They do not exist to keep the writer bound to a certain way of writing, as if their purpose is to make writing as challenging as possible. Rather, they assist the writer to be more clear, articulate, and definite. Although it can certainly be a demanding task to get used to writing in an academically acceptable manner, writing well takes practice. It is, as Johnson has stated, an art, a science, and a craft.

### **The Problem with Academic Writing**

Some of the nuances of academic writing are, at times, debatable. Vyhmesiter and Robertson recommend that academic writers refrain from first-person pronouns. On the other hand, Kate L. Turabian’s reference work, *A Manual for Writers: Of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Turabian), which sets the standard for the Turabian style, states, “Almost everyone has heard the advice to avoid using *I* or *we* in academic writing. In fact, opinions differ on this point. Some teachers tell students never to use *I* because it makes their writing ‘subjective.’ Others encourage using *I* as a way to make

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<sup>23</sup> Vyhmeister and Robertson, *Quality*, 195-97.



writing more lively and personal.”<sup>24</sup> Much, as pointed out by White, might seem to be just a minor matter of preference. However, sometimes that preference is determined by a grading professor, and not the writer. This makes for unclear expectations, especially for students. Educators who are grading papers may choose to be strict when it comes to style. Because of this, it may be advantageous for students if their schools have writing policies and standards in place. Even so, some professors might believe that such policies and standards take away from their freedom to educate how they desire. Unfortunately, there is not always much consistency between professors when it comes to writing expectations either. This clash of ideals may lead to disorder and confusion about writing requirements.

Beyond this, the trend of schools of higher education no longer requiring courses for academic writing is also notable. Author of the book, *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*, Eric Hayot, believes that much of the time, it does not appear that many graduate schools are teaching writing at all. He says,

It is more startling to realize that even when writing is taught—and it is, though usually unconsciously and implicitly—what little instruction that does happen doesn’t actually teach students how to write in ... professional formats, instead of inculcating habits that make it more difficult to write well in them. All in all, much of what graduate school teaches about writing and writing practice makes things harder and worse.<sup>25</sup>

What Hayot is arguing is that in many cases, the importance of learning how to write well is overlooked, yet students are still expected to know how to write academically for their

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<sup>24</sup> Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., rev. Wayne C. Booth, et al. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 120. Italics in original.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), 8.

fields. Some students might feel as if they had been set up to fail. Hayot admits that there are many faculty members who do their best to teach strong writing habits, but he sees that the problem is in the institution. Some teachers are doing their part to ensure students have some structure of support, but it is not coming from the schools themselves. Hayot laments, "... though I hope that every student gets to study with a faculty member who teaches writing well, I know that the sheer luck of the draw... will in many cases mean that students get almost no writing instruction at all. ... The problem is structural rather than personal."<sup>26</sup> To add to these institutional oversights, Buell points out that high schools focus on preparing students for college, and it might cause them to ignore the basic writing needs of students. She says,

Since much of the scholarship tagged Basic Writing discusses higher education contexts, it makes sense that the emphasis would be here, but it is also a legitimate concern since high school teachers work with underprepared writers and have a mix of students who are going to college or seeking other paths. Additionally, high schools now push to have students be college ready, and that often means expecting that students will circumvent developmental courses in college, blurring the line between preparatory and developmental instruction. Additionally, as there is a tendency for college level instructors to blame weak writing ability on high school teaching, conversations across the educational levels must be encouraged.<sup>27</sup>

If there is a lack of basic writing skills from the high school level and through college, as Buell suggests, and it is also witnessed in graduate schools, as Hayot believes, then it is most assuredly the case that such problems are bound to occur at even the post-graduate level as well. There is an expectation that students will just simply know how to write, and it becomes the students' burden that they have never been taught properly.

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<sup>26</sup> Hayot, *Academic*, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Buell, "Teaching," 97.

In many cases, some students believe that they have no reason to need to learn how to write academically. Sword recalls a story:

Recently, a colleague from my own university's medical school told me that she had decided not to enroll in an interdisciplinary faculty development course because it would be a "waste of time" for her to learn about academic writing from anyone outside the medical profession. ... However, ... academics do engage daily in a number of complex and highly specialized operations, and our ability to write effectively about our work requires not only training, commitment, and skill but also a willingness to change, grow, and learn from others.<sup>28</sup>

This observation might be true for academics, but it is also especially true for those who are entering seminary as well. In many cases, pastoring is a second vocation. A 2019 Barna study found that 55% of pastors, before entering ministry, had another career.<sup>29</sup> A field that is heavy in math or science, like engineering for example, may not require a degree in which the students take a lot of writing classes. If someone in such a discipline experiences a career change to a vocation like ministry later in life, seminary may be an expectation. In seminary, students will have to write, usually, extensively. In situations like this, it would undoubtedly be advantageous for people in like conditions had they learned how to write properly prior to their career change.

There are many challenges to overcome in academic writing, and most of them are at the institutional level. Through minor disagreements in a school's academic writing standards, lapses in providing adequate basic writing courses, or students not understanding the importance of the role academic writing plays in their learnings, institutions of higher learning still expect students who have simply not been prepared to know how to write. It should come as no surprise, then, when students are accepted into

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<sup>28</sup> Sword, *Stylish*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> The Barna Group, "More Than Half of Pastors Had Another Career Before Ministry," Articles in Work and Vocation, January 2019, the Barna Group, <http://www.barna.com/half-pastors-prior-career/>.

their respective programs and find themselves falling behind. If schools desire to see success, it is imperative that academic institutions have clear writing standards, writing goals for their students, and provide resources to help alleviate students' anxieties when it comes to writing. In the 2018 article, "Angst About Academic Writing: Graduate Students at the Brink," contributors said that in their research, "Students expressed that feeling unfamiliar with 'the rules of the game' and what is expected of academic writers in a university setting posed barriers to their writing," and that "the use of writing resources as a means to reduce anxiety" and the provision of "tools to students," would help significantly.<sup>30</sup>

Regardless of the difficulties that many students face with their academic writing, being able to write academically is something every seminary student will need to know how to do. If students have not learned the style in high school or college, the quicker they develop a knowledge and the tools to adequately write papers for their classes, the better off they will be. Writing centers, manuals, and remedial courses are invaluable resources that students can use. However, they must know where and if such resources are available.

### **Research and Thinking Theologically**

Academic writing challenges students to think critically. In seminary, many forms of academic writing will be utilized. Some papers will be more reflective in nature, while others will be book reports. Some may also be sermons, and others, exegetical

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<sup>30</sup> Barbara Holmes, et al., "Angst About Academic Writing: Graduate Students at the Brink," *Contemporary Issues in Education* 11, no. 2 (Second Quarter, 2018), 71. <https://doi.org/10.19030/cier.v11i2.10149>.

assignments. Much of the work, however, will be done through research papers. In their book, *Research and Writing in the Seminary: Practical Strategies and Tools*, authors Diane Capitani and Melanie Baffes say that the intention of a research paper in seminary “is to allow you to deepen your knowledge in a certain area and to demonstrate to the professor how you’ve integrated the course material into your own thinking.”<sup>31</sup> Finding authoritative sources who have something pertinent to say on the topic of one’s choosing informs the writer, who combines different voices together to support an argument being made. Ideally, as Capitani and Baffes point out, the seminary student would also incorporate ideas learned from class lectures and discussions as this gives the professor an idea of the growth in knowledge the student has experienced. In this way, students are adding to a pool of knowledge. Contributors of the Turabian manual say,

... [W]e benefit from the research of others, who likewise benefited from the research of countless others before them. When we walk into a library, we are surrounded by more than twenty-five centuries of research. When we go on the internet, we can read the work of millions of researchers who have posed questions beyond number, gathered untold amounts of information from the research of others to answer them, and then shared their answers with the rest of us. We can carry on their work by asking and ... answering new questions in turn.<sup>32</sup>

Research requires a give and take. A researcher borrows from the knowledge of others, adds that information to what others have said, and synthesizes those voices along with the researcher’s own insights. Then, the researcher puts all these voices in writing and displays them in the academic work, that others may gain insights for themselves. This is a crucial element in the research process. James E. Mauch and Jack W. Birch write in

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<sup>31</sup> Diane Capitani and Melanie Baffes, *Research and Writing in the Seminary: Practical Strategies and Tools* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2014), 102.

<sup>32</sup> Turabian, *Manual*, 5.

their book, *Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Conception to Publication: A Handbook for the Students and Faculty*, "... [R]esearch itself does not produce solutions. Human thought—not research—is the sovereign problem solver. Only when thought is applied to the information unearthed by research is it probable that valid, reliable, and operationally useful outcomes can be expected."<sup>33</sup> A person can conduct the research, but the research is useless without human interpretation and conceptualization. The student takes the research, puts it in order, and then explains what the research means and how it works toward the greater argument being made.

Even though research requires human thought to provide the text with value by putting it together in a coherent manner, one still must account for human error. In fact, writing academically in seminary will require more than research. In order to move toward critical thinking, students must also learn how to think theologically, which helps to inform academic writing. It can be said that in one way or another, everyone has a theology. Plainly stated, theology is the way in which one thinks about God. In his book, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Daniel L. Migliore says, "Theology arises from the freedom and responsibility of the Christian community to inquire about its faith in God."<sup>34</sup> However, St. Anselm of Canterbury says, "For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand."<sup>35</sup> This

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<sup>33</sup> James E. Mauch and Jack W. Birch, *Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Conception to Publication: A Handbook for the Students and Faculty*, Books in Library and Information Science: A Series of Monographs and Textbooks, vol. 43, ed. Allen Kent (New York, NY: Marcel Dekker, 1983), 10.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Anselm, "Proslogion," *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works: Including Monologion, Proslogion, and Why God Became Man*, Oxford World's Classics, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008). 87.

phrase is more commonly rendered as “faith seeking understanding,” and has become the classical definition of theology, particularly for Christians. Before Anselm, Migliore makes the point that Augustine believed that “knowledge of God not only presupposes faith, but faith also restlessly seeks deeper understanding.”<sup>36</sup> If this is the case for all who have a Christian faith, then all Christians, as a means for seeking God, have a theology.

This is fundamental to seminary students as they begin their research. No seminarian is a blank slate. Every student comes with some understanding of God, whether it is ill-defined or intricately systematized throughout every aspect of one’s life. These conceptions give students certain biases and preconceived notions about the faith that might be easily and subconsciously implemented into the student’s research. It could even cause the student to dismiss the arguments of others. The issue with that is that if biases affect a paper, it can unfairly skew the argument. Badke says, “When our worldview is challenged by new, contradictory, and potentially compelling information, we become anxious and uncertain. Not finding such emotions comfortable, we try, more often than not, to screen out those contradictory voices and believe what fits our worldview, even if it is based on unreliable data.”<sup>37</sup> When a student or researcher encounters this temptation, it is known as “confirmation bias.” For this reason, it is important for the seminary writer to think theologically. In her essay, “Thinking Mindfully,” Jennifer M. Shepherd says,

Encountering the unexpected in a seminary classroom is an unavoidable hazard for students. ... It is unavoidable because in seminary, as in life and ministry, students become aware of their partial perspectives, are asked to reflect upon the influence of their religious traditions, and are challenged to consider the various

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<sup>36</sup> Migliore, *Faith*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Badke, *Research*, 328.

interpretive options for belief that may and do exist. In these moments, the bodies of knowledge about God which have been handed down to you, no longer seem secure. Something is always lost when you look up. Stability. Confidence. Naiveté. But much more is waiting to be gained when you can learn to think mindfully about your inherited faith traditions and the development of your personal beliefs.<sup>38</sup>

The preconceived notions that students encounter in life can provide a barrier to further learning if the biases go unnoticed or ignored. Thinking theologically in academic writing, in the classroom setting, and in all areas of life allows the students to understand their own positions, why they hold them, and how to receive another perspective.

Students do not only need to be aware of their own biases that may stand in the way of their research. Biases can be found in sources as well. In *The Structure of Argument*, Annette T. Rottenberg and Donna Haisty Winchell warn, “The expert may not be aware of the bias; even an expert can fall into the trap of ignoring evidence that contradicts his or her own intellectual preferences. Before accepting the interpretation of an expert, you should ask: Is there some reason why I should suspect the motives of this particular source?”<sup>39</sup> Being able to think theologically and critically can help identify these instances and will aid the student in turning out sound research.

One other issue an academic writer must be aware of is whether or not the sources being used are authoritative. When defending an argument, students should desire and consult known and recognized voices in the field in which they are writing. For example, if a student is writing a paper in which the central argument (or the thesis) is that Christians have lost what it means for the Bible to be Scripture, then the sources being

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<sup>38</sup> Jennifer M. Shepherd, “Thinking Mindfully,” *Thinking Theologically*, Foundations for Learning, ed. Eric D. Barreto (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Annette T. Rottenberg and Donna Haisty Winchell, *The Structure of Argument*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2018), 201.



consulted should probably be commentaries written by Biblical theologians, and other academic works written by Church historians, and perhaps even Christian philosophers. Even those in similar fields from a secular perspective can be adequate, so long as they are universally recognized as authoritative voices that can help to bolster, and sometimes contradict, the argument the student makes. The student is taking part in a conversation, and this conversation can support or tear down a thesis.

These authoritative voices provide evidence for the claims being made.

Rottenberg and Haisty Winchell say that “When authors provide evidence in support of their claim, they primarily use facts, examples, statistics, opinions (usually the opinions of experts), and images.”<sup>40</sup> Though many of these examples of evidence can be manipulated to say things they were never trying to say, to be considered “scholarly,” they must be supported by a general consensus among professionals. That is not to say that every voice must agree, rather (and particularly with expert opinions), “the opinions of people recognized as authorities are more reliable than those of people who have neither thought about nor done research on the subject.”<sup>41</sup> Those who have put in the work alongside other known experts become established authorities on the subjects in which they devoted much time and attention. They are a part of the conversation. The writer can have a relatively considerable degree of trust in what the authority has to say. For this reason, scholarly sources are usually peer-reviewed, which should ensure that before books, articles, or essays are set to be published, they are first examined and

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<sup>40</sup> Rottenberg and Haisty Winchell, *Structure*, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Rottenberg and Haisty Winchell, *Structure*, 194.

evaluated by other scholars in the field.<sup>42</sup> Scholarly sources will be written in a formal style, written by academics or scientists, will have cited information, have original information, quotes from other scholarly sources, evaluations of scholarly sources, and an abstract, or a presentation of the work that had been done.<sup>43</sup> Another way to tell if a source has been peer-reviewed is if the book or journal is connected to a university or an academic publishing house, or if the data is taken from a well-respected organization.<sup>44</sup>

Part of writing academic papers involves finding scholarly sources, but it is also important for writers to cite their sources as well. There are three primary citation styles that many schools use: the Modern Language Association (MLA) style, the American Psychological Association (APA), and the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). MLA is generally used for English courses and some humanities, whereas APA is normally used for the sciences.<sup>45</sup> For history and other humanities courses, the typical citation style of choice is CMS. The more commonly used format for theology and religion is the Turabian style, which is a “condensed and adapted” and “more comprehensive” form of CMS.<sup>46</sup> Particularly in seminary, the notes-bibliography format is preferred, which requires footnoted citations as well as a bibliography at the end of the paper. Both the footnotes and the bibliography work to let readers know where the writers have gotten their information. It provides credit to the source, who did the initial research being cited,

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<sup>42</sup> Badke, *Research*, 133.

<sup>43</sup> Hacker, *Writer's*, 336.

<sup>44</sup> Kate L. Turabian, *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., rev. Gregory Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, and the University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 54.

<sup>45</sup> Hacker, *Writer's*, 355, 415.

<sup>46</sup> Turabian, *Manual*, xi; Vyhmeister and Robertson, *Quality*, 247.

as well as credibility to the writer, who lists the scholarly sources provided. It also helps readers to know where they can find more information on the subject being discussed.

### **Conclusion**

Academic writing is an integral and invaluable part of seminary. It challenges students to expand their minds through reading, research, and writing. Though the amount of work involved in each of these can sometimes be overwhelming for some, it is, nevertheless, a way to stretch the mind to think more deeply and thoroughly. Through reading and research, students open themselves up to the thoughts and opinions of experts in relevant fields, providing them with a scholarly foundation on which they can build their own positions. In addition, through academic writing, students are able to find their voice and learn to formulate and articulate those positions well. Being restricted to the academic style provides a structure of discipline for writers to form coherent, logical, organized, and concise arguments. Such discipline shapes and prepares seminary students to provide a relevant voice in the scholarly conversation happening among academics. The student can become an authority.

The goal of seminary should not be to turn out academics. Nor is the goal to overwhelm students with work to keep them busy. Some may be tempted to believe that this is the case because of the work required. The rigors of the work might make the student feel as if this is the objective of their professors. However, the expectations for the schoolwork assigned are high because the assignments are meant to challenge students to stretch their minds and think differently by introducing authoritative voices.

This is not so that students will become academics themselves, though some may, but rather, that they too may become authoritative voices who will faithfully and confidently lead their congregations or ministry settings.

The mission of United Theological Seminary is to “prepare faithful and fruitful leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” The key to the preparation United wants to give its students is the academic work they will be completing. Most of the work students will be encountering will involve a significant amount of writing at the academic level. This work, when taken seriously, will be conducive to the mission statement of United, as students learn to think critically, reflectively, and theologically. Students will become more eloquent, expressive, and confident in the knowledge they came to attain at seminary. These skills they begin to develop will shape them as faithful and fruitful Christian leaders. They can then be regarded as knowledgeable authorities in their ministries, as they have put in the work to have a voice in the conversation along with the academics. However, the work required to get to this place is purposefully demanding.

For this reason, it is necessary that students who are coming into seminary know what to anticipate when it comes to the expected quality of writing assignments, as well as the quantity. Because many students enter seminary having little to no understanding of what academic papers require, it is therefore necessary to have a preliminary, uncredited orientation course that explains the basics of academic writing. Such a course will be beneficial for students to receive the skills and tools necessary to succeed in their respective academic programs. The intention of the project is to introduce academic writing to new and incoming students who may feel lost or uninformed about the seminary’s writing standards. Academic writing is so intrinsic to seminary in that it

establishes a benchmark for achieving knowledge. Students must be familiar with the style in order to make full use of what seminary has to offer.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

“The Academic Writing Orientation for Seminary Students” was a course created through the Writing Center at United Theological Seminary. This course served as a Doctor of Ministry project evaluating the need for a preliminary primer on academic writing for incoming students. The Writing Center Coordinator was responsible for formulating the curriculum of the course and assessing the turned-in assignments. All students who took the course also took part in the optional project in conjunction with the course. Each individual signed a waiver indicating that they had given his or her permission to be an essential component of the study.

Prior to the start of the course, three invitation emails were sent out to the master’s program student body of United Theological Seminary. All master’s students were invited to take part in the research, with no exception. In all, fifty-eight students responded and signed up to participate in the research study. Out of those, thirty-two actually began the course. Thirteen students dropped out at different times, leaving nineteen who took the course to completion. However, three of those students did not provide enough data to be included in the project. The final number of students who completed the course for the sake of analysis in this project was sixteen. These sixteen individuals were designated a letter-number code in order to keep their personal

information private. Each letter-number code begins with R and is numbered 1-16. There is no particular order in which these numbers were assigned.

The submitted information came in five primary ways: through pre- and post-course surveys, homework assignments, reflections, a questions and answers forum, and the optional post-course interview. All the data collected has been utilized to glean insights that would determine the need for the orientation course being offered to new students at United Theological Seminary and the relative merits, demerits, and opportunities for the future of the course.

The course used a virtual platform to reach the maximum number of master's students possible. It opened on February 5, 2024, and ran until July 1, 2024. There were six modules for the course, each containing video lectures that lasted between two and fifteen minutes, homework assignments, and reflections. There was also a forum in which participants could choose to ask any questions they may have had regarding the material being taught. Each participant was allowed to take the course at their own pace, on their own time, so long as they waited one week between modules.

### **Means of Qualitative Data Collection**

#### *Pre-course Survey*

Every project participant began by completing an initial survey of nineteen questions. The questions were designed for students to provide answers that would then be compared with the answers students would provide on the post-course survey. Each question was designed for the purpose of collecting the data of those who participated in order to help gauge the need for an orientation course on academic writing. The pre-

course survey asked some questions regarding the demographics of the student. For instance, the question was asked, “How many terms have you been in seminary?” The purpose of asking such questions is to compare that data between those who have been in seminary longer and those who are newer seminary students. Likewise, questions were asked about educational history, languages spoken, and possible learning disabilities.

After the demographic-affiliated questions, the survey then offered queries concerning the student’s knowledge of United’s academic writing standards, as well as their understanding and comfortability regarding academic writing requirements. Each of these preliminary questions are designed to gauge the student’s readiness and self-assurance for writing masters-level papers. After the course, those who had taken part in the project were asked follow-up questions to determine the amount of change that took place, if any.

#### *Post-course Survey*

As mentioned, participants in the project had been assigned the initial pre-course survey to gauge where the students were before taking the course. After taking the course, they were asked to participate in one more post-course survey. This survey consisted of thirteen questions, eleven of which were directly related to the prompts on the pre-course survey. These were compared and contrasted to determine the amount of growth and understanding participants experienced as a result of taking the course. The other two questions asked: “Did you find this course to be helpful for understanding the basics of academic writing? Explain,” and “For those who are past your first term of seminary, do you believe this course would have been more helpful during your seminary



orientation to help prepare you for the quality of the work to be expected? Explain. If you are in your first term, write, 'I am in my first term.'" These questions were key because they allowed participants to express their opinions concerning the usefulness and necessity of the course.

### *Homework Assignments*

This course included a total of five homework assignments. The first module did not include a homework assignment, however, each other module included one homework assignment that was to be completed after the module's lessons. The homework assignments varied in levels of difficulty, but they were all accomplished between ten minutes and one hour. The purpose of these assignments is twofold. First, they were an imperative part of the orientation course upon which this project is built. Second, they also served as a means of collecting qualitative data. The students have turned in their assignments, and the Writing Center Coordinator has evaluated them in order to compare them with the answers provided in the pre- and post-course surveys. It also gave an opportunity for the Writing Center Coordinator to provide individual feedback to the participants, many of whom expressed their gratitude.

### *Reflections*

The use of student reflections in this project was helpful for establishing an understanding of the students' perception of the topics covered in each module. This sometimes encompassed past experiences and feelings, combined with new insights received through taking the course. This provided a fuller concept of students' own

understandings in their own words. The reflections also served to capture some of the students' anxieties as well as their hopes, which was advantageous for the goals of the project.

### *Interview Questions*

Interviews were used as another form of qualitative data to collect information from participants. This was optional for participants. Out of the sixteen students who completed the course, six of them agreed to an interview. The objective of the post-course interviews was to provide a more in-depth understanding of the students' own self-assessment. The interviews took between ten and thirty minutes to conduct, and were also used to expose the areas of strength and weakness in the course, to highlight potential aspects of writing that ought to have been in the course, to determine from the students' perspective whether or not their outlook on writing had changed, and to understand if students see their academic assignments as necessary for their preparation for ministry. This helped to inform the project by bolstering the course's necessity, as having a knowledge of practical aspects of academic writing would translate into real-world application in ministry.

### *Questions and Answers Forum*

The course included a forum in which students could post their questions that were pertinent to the course and receive answers. It also gave the students an opportunity to interact with each other, if desired. There were no prompts given, just an open forum that was completely accessible throughout the duration of the course, no matter which

module the student was on. This was to provide clarity for participants, and it also allowed them to point out ideas that were relevant to academic writing, yet may not have been included in the course. Not every student needed such clarity, and not every student had questions. Therefore, this means of data collection was optional.

### **Course Overview and Implementation**

As students began the course, they entered through United's online student portal. There, they encountered their six modules. The modules together included a total of thirteen video lessons with five assignments and six reflection questions. Some of the assignments were built upon the next to establish a consistent flow for writing a paper.

The first session of the course presented important information that the students would need to know. It included the informed consent form, which was to be completed prior to the rest of the course. After signing the consent form, students were then directed to the pre-course survey. Upon finishing the survey, participants were then allowed access to the lessons and assignments. This first module included four videos. The purpose of the first video, entitled, "Seminary Foundations," explained the purpose of the course, the importance of the project, the means by which the project would be collecting their data, and what could be gained from their participation. The following three videos had a focus on the project's foundations: Biblical, Historical, and Theological. There was no need for a video explaining the Interdisciplinary foundation, academic writing, because the whole course is centered on learning the basics of the discipline. Each of these foundations emphasizes different aspects of the importance of the course to be taken, as well as the importance of the role that academic writing plays in the students'

seminary career. From there, students were then directed to a forum in which they had the opportunity to ask questions they may have had, or make any pertinent comments. This forum stayed open through each of the six modules.

The first of the foundations to be covered was the Biblical foundations for the project. The supporting text is found in Genesis 45:4-8, which says the following:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”<sup>1</sup>

The reason for choosing this text is because it conveys a larger purpose beyond the situations that lie at the surface of the story. In Joseph’s tale, his brothers had sold him into slavery, and through a series of unfortunate circumstances, Joseph still managed to become the second highest authority in all of Egypt. This is due to the fact that God had always been with him, even in his lowest times, but also because God used Joseph to accomplish his will to save the nation of Israel. This scripture shows that even when one may not understand why God had brought a person to a certain place, the greater purpose is known to God, and will be revealed at the right time. This should serve as an encouragement to those entering seminary, whether they have a clear understanding of why they are there or not. Ultimately, the work of the assignments to be completed, though they may seem tedious at the time, will reveal God’s greater purpose. The education that the seminary will provide and the students will be receiving will direct the

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

path that God is laying out for them. Just as Joseph trained in his times of hardship, the purpose of academic writing in seminary is to prepare a student for the ministry to come later.

The second topic covered was the Historical foundations, which involves the history of Methodist educational formation. Because United is a United Methodist school, it is pertinent that such a project be tied to the Methodist movement. From the beginning, Methodists had a unique relationship with schooling. The movement actually began with a core group of students at Oxford University. A value of the importance of education had been intertwined with Methodism from the beginning. However, with other roots in pietism, there existed a natural skepticism toward the over-education of clergy as well. Yet through it all, clergy education, complete with proper Christian formation had been an expectation, at least to some degree, throughout the history of the church. This foundation was to show incoming students that seminary is, from a Wesleyan perspective at the very least, a crucial part of becoming an ordained minister. The reason this is important to highlight is because many clergy and would-be clergy come to seminary often because their denomination obligates them to go. However, showing the historical origins of higher education in Methodism was to help some students understand that earning a seminary degree is more than an obligation, but a calling. The calling is a set apart time of training and education in theology and ministry. Academic papers are designed to push students in order for them to grow deeper through the knowledge of others. The academic writing the students will encounter in seminary will challenge as well as assist them as they prepare for ministry.

St. Bonaventure's theology of seeking higher knowledge is the third foundation of the project: the Theological foundation. From Bonaventure's point of view, all knowledge is illuminated by God for the purposes of better understanding God. In other words, the reason for attending seminary is not to gain knowledge for the sake of gaining knowledge. Rather, it is to love God with all of one's mind. As students struggle with writing their assignments, it would be advantageous for them to keep in mind that everything they are doing, though it is a benefit to themselves, is to ultimately impact the kingdom of God. This again unites preparation and education with a sense of purpose. If incoming students view their education as another way of becoming more like Christ, they would likely gain a better understanding of the reason behind their academic work.

The final foundation of the project covered the discipline of Academic Writing. As mentioned, it was not expounded upon in this first module. Because the project relies so heavily on academic writing throughout the course, it would have been redundant. However, insights from the Interdisciplinary foundation paper were heavily employed, especially when discussing something relevant to the topic. Writing is a fundamental part of seminary education. It helps the student to communicate clearly and express knowledge of learned material in a constructive manner. Knowing how to write, then, is essential for the seminary student to succeed. Presenting an awareness of academic writing will help students in the formation of their academic papers.

When the lessons of the first module were completed, the student was then asked to reflect on the following: "Explain your history of writing. Have you ever written academically? What, if any, are some of your concerns about academic writing? How do you believe your writing will help you in your seminary career?"

For the second module, two video lessons discussed making an argument. Lesson 2a went over the difference between an argument and an assertion. Primarily, an assertion is simply a stated opinion, whereas an argument ought to be falsifiable and is built by supporting evidence. Lesson 2a also defined “falsifiable” as the ability for a claim to be proven false. Lesson 2b introduced students to the concepts of deductive and inductive reasoning and how they factor into argument. Deductive arguments begin with a general truth and narrows to a specific truth. For example, insects have six legs. A cricket is an insect. Therefore, a cricket has six legs. Inductive arguments are based on an observed truth that is intended to predict the likelihood of a specific outcome. As an example, in recent years, white Christmases have been increasingly rare in Ohio. Therefore, it will probably not snow on Christmas in Ohio this year. A nuanced understanding of argument is essential to knowing how to write an academic paper because it helps a student to see the logic of not only his or her own argument, but also the arguments of the essays, articles, and books he or she may be using as a resource. Both lessons 2a and 2b are therefore fundamental building blocks upon which the rest of the lessons were assembled. The assignment that followed, then, required the student to submit an example of an inductive argument and a deductive argument. The student was then asked to reflect on the following questions: “What is the difference between an argument and an assertion?” and “How can knowing the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning help you with understanding argument?”

The seventh video was in lesson 3. This video discussed writing a proper thesis statement. Writing thesis statements is one of the more popular reasons why students visit United’s Writing Center. It can often be challenging for many students to organize their

ideas in a way that they can succinctly explain the goal of the papers they are writing.

The lesson defined a thesis statement and explained how to state the intentions of the paper indicating the subject, the writer's argument, and the reasoning used to support the argument. For example, an acceptable thesis statement may look like the following: "This paper will argue that 'the gift of God,' to which Jesus refers when speaking with the woman at the well in John 4:10 is a reference to the Holy Spirit because of the Holy Spirit's connection with water in the Gospel of John." In the example, the intention is stated clearly with the words, "This paper will argue that...." The subject of the thesis is "the gift of God" that Jesus mentions. The argument is that the subject, i.e., "the gift of God," is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Then, the reasoning to be argued later in the paper is that the Holy Spirit has a connection with water in the Gospel of John. A strong thesis statement is the very beginning of a strong paper. If the reader has a clear direction as to where the paper is leading, the reader will likely follow the writer's line of logic more closely. The assignment to follow the video had the student write a thesis statement with a subject, the argument, and the student's reasoning. The reflection prompt for this module asked students, "What are some of the challenges you face when writing a proper thesis statement?"

In the fourth module, lesson 4a taught the construction of a paragraph using the acronym, M.E.A.L. "M" stands for the paragraph's main idea. "E" is for the evidence that supports the paragraph's main idea. "A" is the student's analysis of the evidence. In other words, the student was to explain what the evidence means and how it supports the main idea in his or her own words. "L," then, is the link to the main thesis. Every paragraph



should somehow connect to the thesis statement the writer puts forward in his or her paper. The following paragraph will be used as an example of the M.E.A.L. format:

The idea that “the gift of God” is a reference to the Holy Spirit seems to follow the logic of the narrative between chapters 3 and 4 in John’s Gospel. In Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in the third chapter, he tells him, “...no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> After this, the story moves from there to Jesus and his disciples baptizing in the Judean countryside, to John the Baptist and his followers baptizing at Aenon. From there, the narrative takes the reader to a well in Samaria where a woman is drawing water. This is significant to the flow of the narrative because in many Christian traditions, one is “born of water and the Spirit” through the waters of baptism.

In the above paragraph, the main idea is that understanding “the gift of God” as the Holy Spirit is a logical step considering the flow of the narrative of John’s Gospel. The evidence is that in the previous chapter, Jesus tells Nicodemus that one must be born by water and the Spirit before one can enter the kingdom of God. To further the point, the sentence to follow explains that after Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, the narrative moves to Jesus’ presence among the disciples as they baptize people in the Judean wilderness, and even John the Baptist and his followers baptizing at Aenon. After these events, the theme of the use of water and the Christian life is still being used with Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well. These bits of evidence indicate that the tying of water and Spirit have not yet stopped. The analysis, then, is that this theme of water is important to the story because many Christians believe that a Christian “is born of water and the Spirit” through the waters of Baptism. The link to the main thesis becomes evident in the analysis, that as John continues to use the theme of water, so too he continues to use the theme of Spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> John 3:5

The assignment after the video had students create their own paragraph using the M.E.A.L acronym based on the thesis statement they provided in the previous assignment. This was expected to be somewhat of a challenge for some students, but its purpose was to give an example of what students may come to expect as they begin writing their academic papers for their classes.

Lesson 4b utilized the “Temple Illustration” developed by Dr. Scott Kisker to explain building a paper. According to Kisker, writing a paper is like building a temple. The thesis of a paper is the roof of the temple. This will also serve as the paper’s introduction, as the thesis statement is found in the introduction of the paper. Beneath the roof of the temple is the entablature, or the subclaims of the thesis or main claim. Holding up the roof and the entablature are the pillars. These pillars represent the evidence used to support the subclaims, thus backing up the main claim. The sub-claims and evidence will make up the paper’s body. The foundations that anchor the pillars are the warrants, which are the assumptions that lay beneath the evidence. The evidence relies on these assumptions. For example, if one were to argue that the highest ideals of humanity are to love God and love one’s neighbors, the warrant of this claim is that the Christian scriptures are authoritative. The warrants, being the foundation, are not necessarily seen in the paper, as they are assumed. Finally, the base of the temple is the conclusion of the paper. The conclusion will recapitulate the subclaims and explain how they work to tie the paper together, providing full support for the thesis.

Lesson 4b did not have an assignment attached to it because it would require the student to write an entire paper. This would not be practical to the nature of the project. However, the reflection prompt asked students to write their thoughts concerning the

following questions: “How has the M.E.A.L (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Link to main idea) acronym helped you to understand how to write a paragraph?” and “What did you find helpful about the Temple Analogy when it comes to writing your papers?”

Lesson 5a in the course covered the topic of proper paper formatting. This included the format of a cover page, one-inch margins on all sides of the paper, the page number consistently placed on every page, and the placement of the bibliography. It also set the font standard as 12 point, “Times New Roman,” for paper writing. Lesson 5b navigated students through the Writing Center Canvas page. This was to help students learn how to best utilize the site and teach them about where they may locate different resources offered by the Writing Center. The assignment connected with this lesson was simply to visit United’s Writing Center Canvas page and download and review the documents entitled “A Guide for Formatting,” and “Paper Formatting Example PDF,” both of which go into more specific details about how to properly format academic papers. This assignment was based on an honor system. If the student indicated that he or she completed the assignment, the student was able to move to the next lesson. The reflection question asked participants, “What are some of your struggles when it comes to formatting your papers?” and “How can the Writing Center benefit you as you write your papers?”

Lesson 6 was also split into parts a and b, as it highlighted quoting and citing in the Turabian (notes-bibliography) style. Because United’s academic standards require the use of the Turabian style format, lesson 6a explained how footnotes work in papers, when to use them, and how to format them properly. The use of quotations was also a focus in this lesson in order to help explain the necessity and usefulness of utilizing footnotes in

one's paper. There are, however, many ways footnotes can be used. As a result, this lesson only gave a few basic examples of how to cite a book with a single author, how to cite an article, and how to cite an online journal. Students can build their understanding of how to create more elaborate footnotes over time. Additionally, creating shortened citations was also discussed, as well as an explanation of plagiarism for the students to understand the reason for proper citation.

The video for lesson 6b explained writing a bibliography and how it differs from footnotes, though providing both is necessary while using the Turabian style. The assignment that followed asked participants to quote from the chapter provided by Dr. David F. Watson's book, *Scripture and the Life of God: Why the Bible Matters Today More than Ever*. Participants were then asked to give all the information that goes into a citation according to the "notes-bibliography style" Turabian format. This included the author, the name of the book, the place of publishing and publisher, the year of publishing, and the page on which the quote is found. Then students created a second citation of the same information in the bibliography format. They were then asked to reflect on these questions: "What are your concerns when it comes to plagiarism?" and "What is the importance of citing your sources?"

After all the videos had been watched and the assignments and reflections finished in each of the six modules, no grading had been provided. A grade is not necessary, especially for an orientation course. However, the assignments the students submitted have been evaluated by the Writing Center Coordinator and were compared with the answers each respective student had given in his or her surveys. This is elaborated in the project. Along with the assignments, the data from both the pre- and

post-course surveys have been collected, compared, and compiled into graphs that were then used to help measure the successes and/or failures of the project. The information provided from reflections and the questions and answers forum was also used for evaluation to receive a more well-rounded understanding of what worked well, and what did not seem to work well for the course.

### **Summary of Learning**

The hypothesis of this project is that if students participate in the academic writing curriculum offered by the Academic Writing Orientation for Seminary Students, they will be better prepared to write master's-level work. In this hypothesis, participants will gain greater self-confidence, deepen their knowledge of academic writing, and enjoy a greater appreciation for the work they encounter in seminary. The data that follows had been collected and compared to determine the successes and/or failures of the course to meet the goals of the hypothesis.

#### *Pre- and Post-Course Survey Results*

The first question of the pre-course survey participants were asked to answer was “How many terms have you been in seminary?” The results showed that two participants (12.5%) were in their first term, seven participants (43.75%) were in their second term, no participants (0%) were in their third term, four participants (25%) were in their fourth term, two participants (12.5%) were in their fifth term, and one participant (6.25%) was a part-time student in a twelfth term.

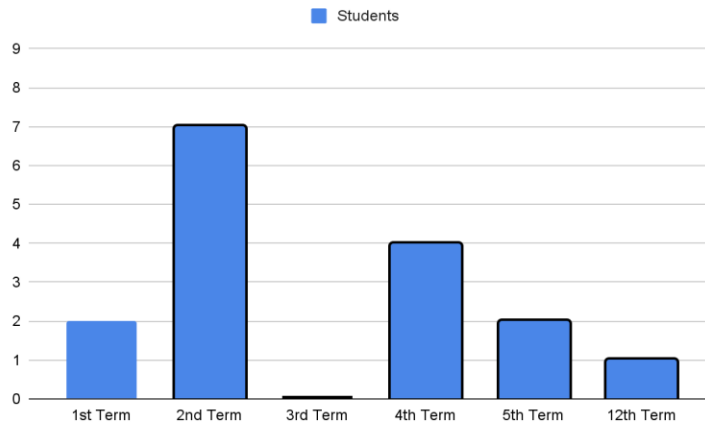


Figure 1: Pre-survey responses indicating participants' seminary term.

The second prompt for the pre-course survey had students state whether or not they had a bachelor's degree, and if they had a previous master's degree. Nine participants (56.3%) indicated that they hold a bachelor's degree. Four participants (25%) stated that they have a previous masters' degree. Three participants (18.8%) indicated that they do not have any previous degree at all.

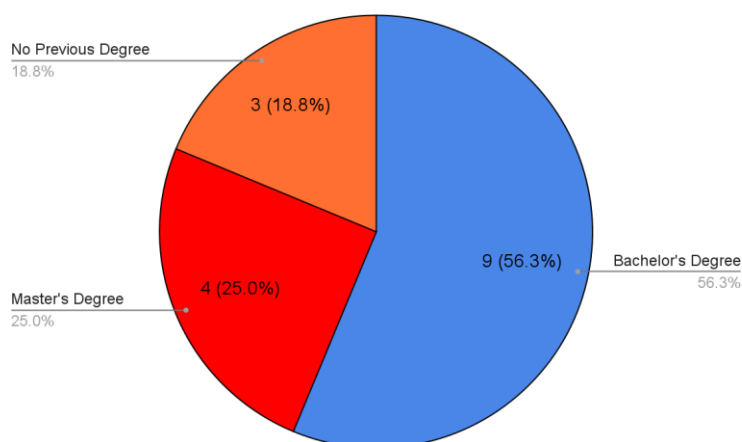


Figure 2: Pre-survey responses indicating participants' previous degrees.

The third prompt for the pre-course survey asked participants with a previous degree(s), “Was your bachelor's degree a BS or a BA?” Out of the thirteen participants who held a prior degree, eight have a Bachelor of Arts degree, and five have a Bachelor of Science degree.

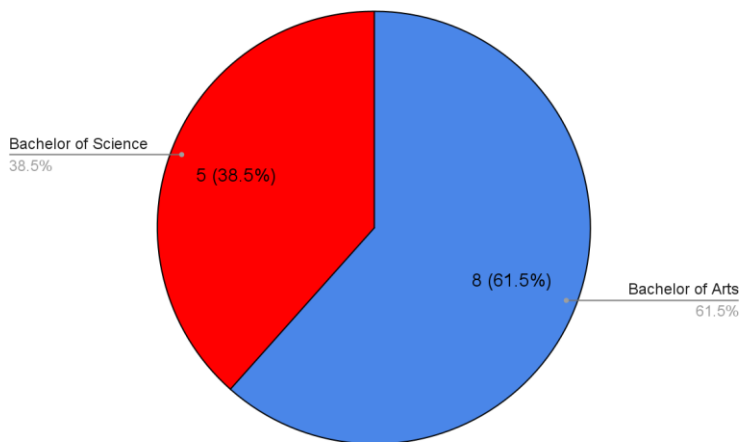


Figure 3: Pre-course survey responses indicating if degrees earned were BA's, or BS's.

The fourth pre-course survey prompt inquired whether or not the participant had written academically before. The survey revealed that fifteen people (93.8%) had written at least one academic paper before. One person (6.3%) had never written an academic paper.

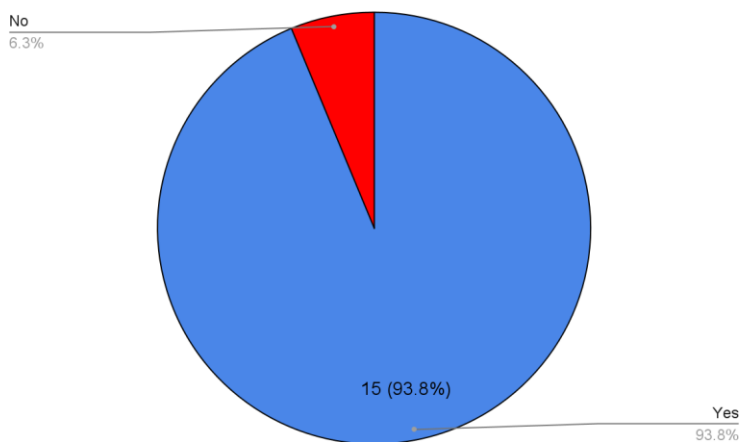


Figure 4: Pre-course survey responses indicating whether or not participants had written academically before.

The next prompt asked students, “How many years has it been since your most recent academic degree?” The results showed that for eleven participants (68.8%), it had been more than ten years. For one individual (6.3%), it has been one to five years. For four participants (25%), it had been less than one year since receiving their most recent degree.

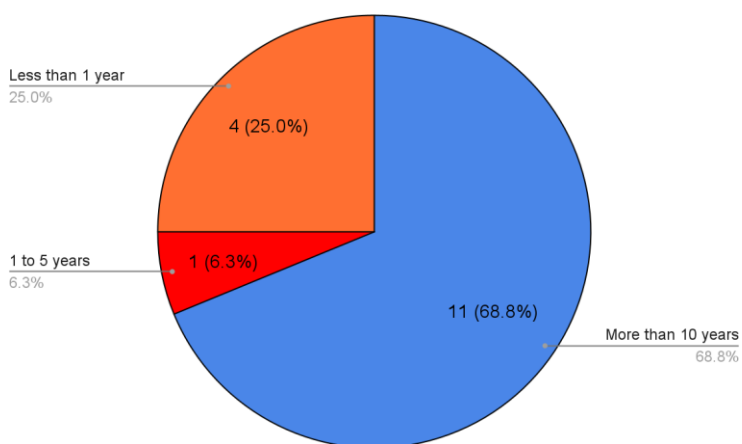


Figure 5: Pre-course survey responses indicating how many years had passed since the students' most recent degree.



The sixth prompt was a yes or no question that stated, “English is my first language.” fourteen participants (87.5%) said “Yes.” Two participants (12.5%) said “No.” Those whose native language was something other than English were asked to elaborate. One student (R3) replied, “I speak many languages; French is one of them.” The second participant (R8) said, “My first language was Yoruba.”

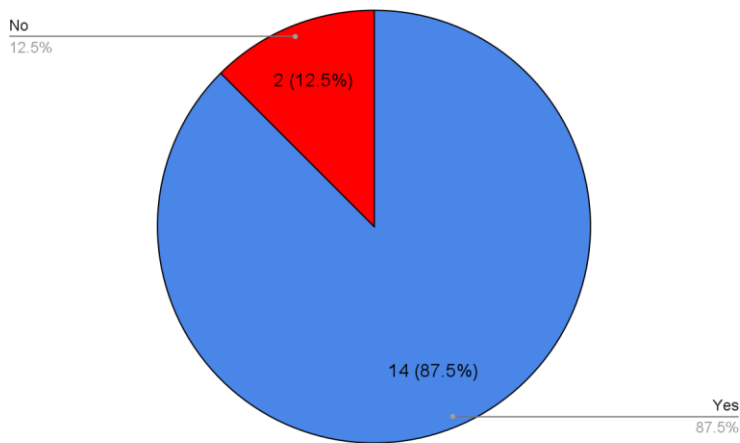


Figure 6: Pre-course survey responses indicating the number of students who have a native language other than English.

The next pre-course survey prompt asked, “Have you been diagnosed with a learning disability, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, or other?” All sixteen participants (100%) indicated that they had never been diagnosed with a learning disability of any kind.

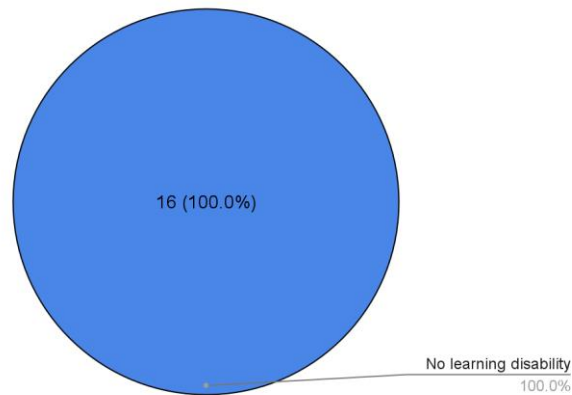
**Students Diagnosed with a Learning Disability**

Figure 7: Pre-course survey responses indicating that no participants had ever been diagnosed with a learning disability.

This question concluded the demographics portion of the survey. The following pre-course survey prompts have been linked to the post-course survey results to gauge the growth that occurred after taking the course. The first of these prompts said, “To the best of your knowledge, explain United's Academic Writing Standards.” Participants were also asked to refrain from looking up the answer, and to only answer based on their own personal knowledge. The answer this project was looking for would mention, primarily, the Turabian (notes/bibliography) style. It would also have been acceptable to see a knowledge of proper formatting, such as Times New Roman, size 12 font, with 1” margins. Below are the results of the pre-course survey.

**Students With Knowledge of United's Academic Standards  
Prior to Writing Course**

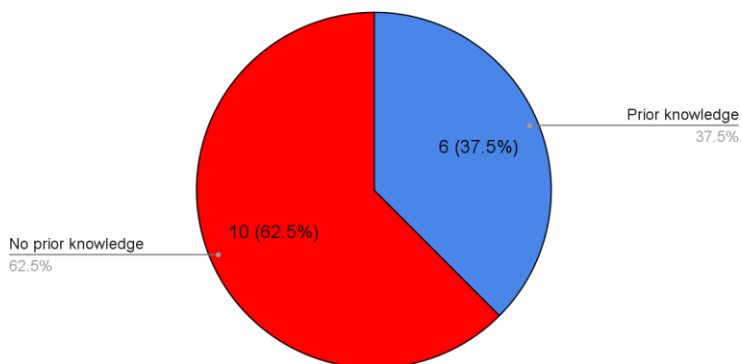


Figure 8: Results from the pre-course survey regarding prior knowledge of United's academic writing standards.

Prior to taking the course, six out of sixteen participants (37.5%) expressed a knowledge of United's academic writing standards. Ten participants (62.5%) had little or no knowledge of United's academic writing standards. After taking the course, little growth was observed.

**Students With Knowledge of United's Academic Standards  
After Writing Course**

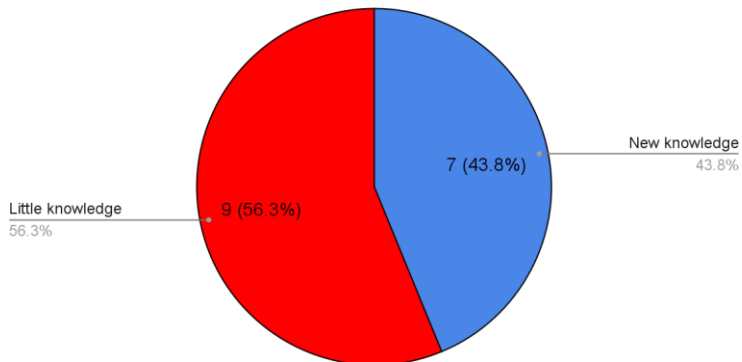


Figure 9: Results from the post-course survey regarding knowledge of United's academic writing standards.

The number of students who knew United's academic writing standards rose by a single participant. However, three of the six participants who expressed a prior knowledge of United's standards did not provide adequate information to perceive growth. For example, participant R9 answered the prompt in the pre-course survey, "No plagiarism. Use Turabian to document papers." This conveys some previous knowledge. In the post-course survey, R9 answered the prompt, "No plagiarism or you will likely fail your class." This may indicate that the knowledge was retained, but the emphasis on this knowledge may not have been stressed enough during lessons.

The next prompt from the pre- and post-course surveys were designed to measure growth in knowledge of academic writing. The prompt asks participants to explain in their own understanding, "What is academic writing, and how does it differ from other forms like sermons, journaling, etc...?" An answer that indicates a knowledge of the subject would use language that communicates formality, citations, utilizing authoritative sources, analysis, and objectivity. The results are included below.

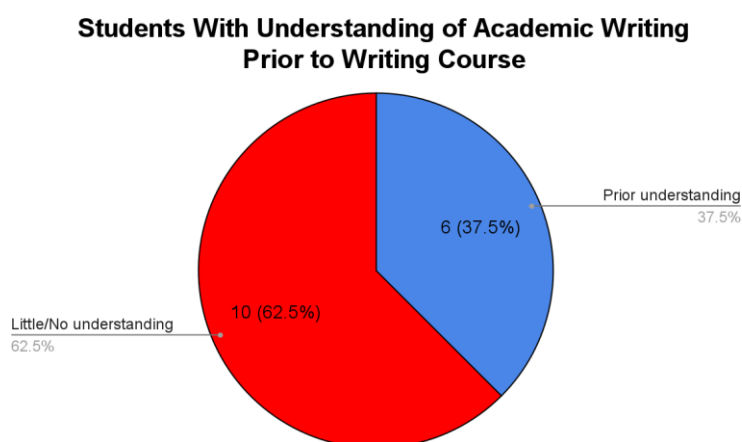


Figure 10: Results from the pre-course survey showing how many participants understand academic writing.

Six of the participants (37.5%) communicated an adequate understanding of the nature and purpose of academic writing. Ten students (62.5%) either did not know or had very little apprehension of academic writing and how it differs from other forms of writing. Following the course, much growth was perceived in this area.

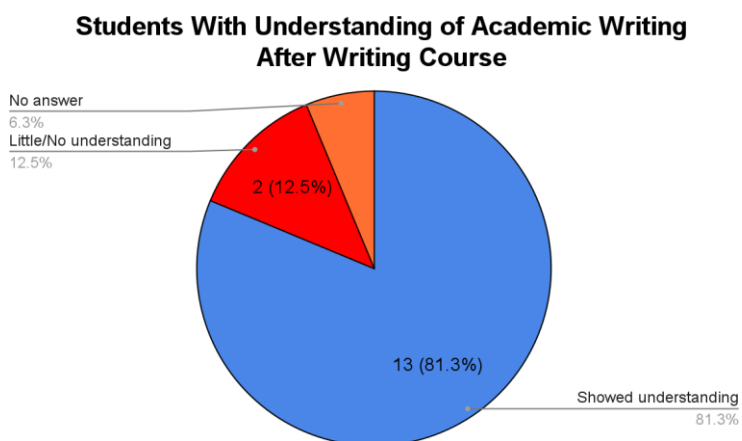


Figure 11: Results of the post-course survey showing how many students understand academic writing.

Thirteen out of sixteen students (81.3%) were able to articulate a knowledgeable understanding of academic writing to some degree. Two participants (12.5%) did not give an adequate response to the prompt. For example, one participant answered, “Academic writing is scholarly writing that includes certain standards.” Another said, “Much more in-depth on a particular topic or idea. Very little personal reflection allowed.” These responses were too vague to indicate growth in knowledge of the topic. One person (6.3%) did not answer the prompt. The results indicate that the information on this topic provided in the course was likely well-explained and well-received.

The next prompt asked participants, “In your seminary experience so far, have any of your writing assignments felt like ‘busy work’?” Those who were entering their first term were asked to indicate that it was their first term.

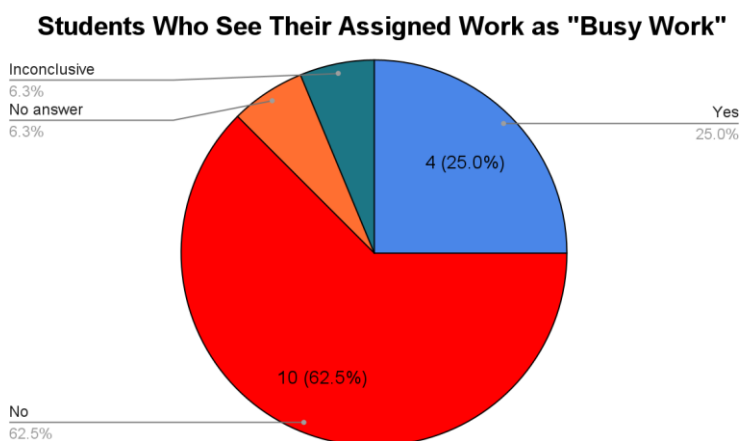


Figure 12: Results from the pre-course survey indicating how many students view their assigned work as “busy work.”

Of the sixteen participants, four (25%) indicated that their assigned homework did feel like “busy work.” Ten students (62.5%) communicated that this was not the case for them. One (6.3%) stated it was their first term and had no previous experience with homework or paper writing at that point. One (6.3%) response was inconclusive as it did not answer the question.

The prompt for the post-course survey had slightly different wording, but was directed to measure any change resulting from the course. It asked, “After taking the course, have you developed a new appreciation for your writing assignment(s) that, at that time, may have felt like ‘busy work’?” Just as in the pre-course survey, the post-course survey asked first-term participants to indicate this information instead.

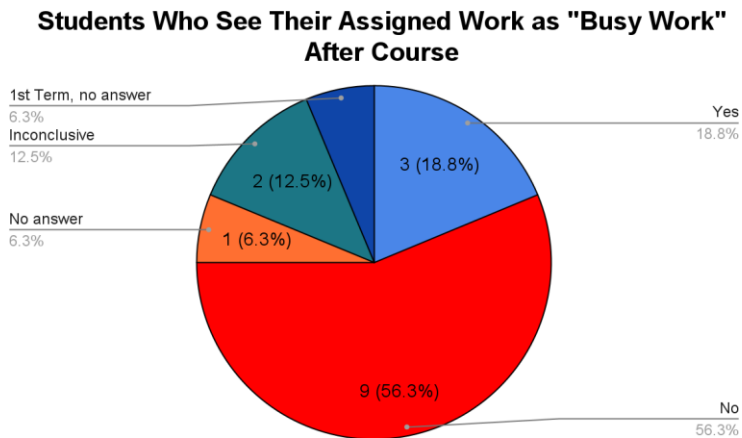


Figure 13: Results from the post-course survey indicating how many students view their assigned work as “busy work.”

Nine students (56.3%) stated that they have a new appreciation for their writing assignments. Three students (18.8%) have communicated that their assignments still feel like busy work. Two students (12.5%) did not answer the question in a way that gave conclusive responses. One student (6.3%) indicated that it was their first term. One student (6.3%) did not answer the prompt. One participant answered in the pre-course survey that the writing assignments do not feel like busy work. However, this participant stated in the post-course survey that, “They still seem like busy work to me. I would appreciate the writing assignments more if there weren't so many rules regarding the formatting and structure.” Given the data, it cannot be definitively stated the project was successful in helping students to see their assignments as something more than “busy work.”

The next survey prompt asked participants to explain “thinking theologically” in their own words. Students who could articulate a proper understanding of thinking theologically would use language that reflects the provided definition: thinking

theologically is a form of critical thinking that allows one to understand one's own theological presuppositions and biases, and how these may affect one's understanding of the material being researched. The participants' understandings of theological thinking are expressed in the chart below.

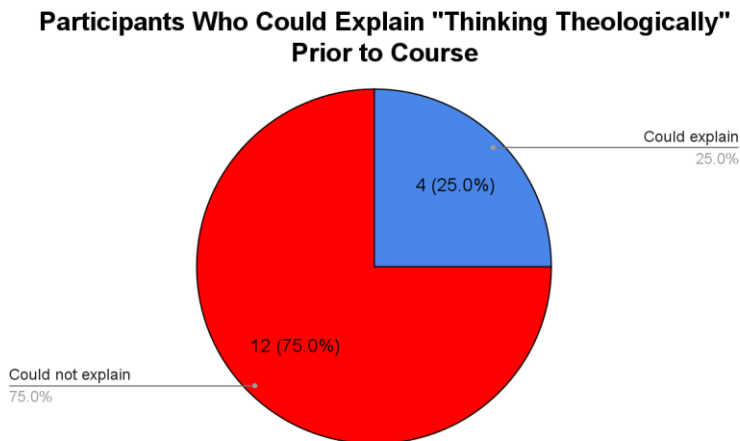


Figure 14: Results from the pre-course survey showing how many participants could explain “thinking theologically.”

Twelve people (75%) either did not know how to explain thinking theologically, or they gave answers that were considered insufficient. Four participants (25%) gave responses that reflected at least some understanding of thinking theologically. No student offered an ambiguous answer that would be deemed inconclusive.



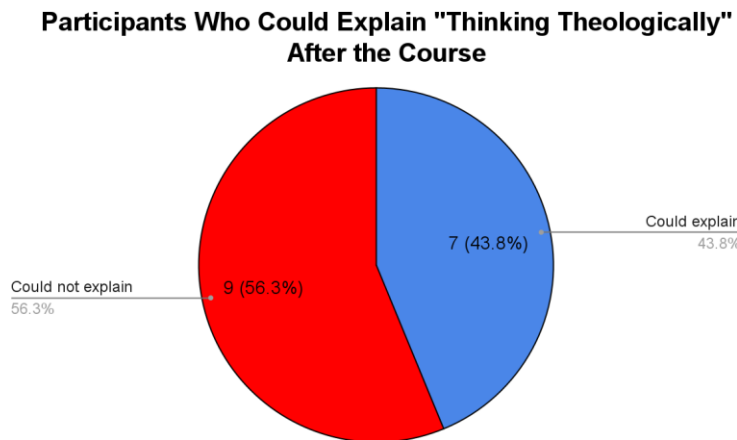


Figure 15: Results from the post-course survey showing how many participants could explain “thinking theologically.”

The post-course survey revealed that seven participants were able to explain “thinking theologically” after taking the course. Nine participants gave responses that did not meet the defining criteria. No student offered an answer that was considered unclear or was inconsistent with their previous answer. Between the four participants who gave an adequate response to the pre-course survey question, and the seven who gave an adequate response in the post-course survey, there was a growth in understanding by 75%.

The next prompt for the pre-course survey asked, “On a scale of one to five, with five being ‘very prepared,’ how prepared do you feel for masters-level writing at United Theological Seminary?” The results of that survey are in the following bar graph.

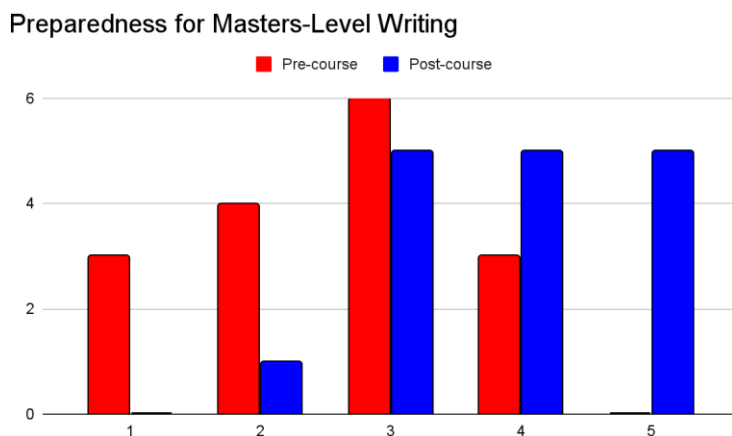


Figure 16: Results from the pre- and post-course surveys showing how many participants felt prepared for masters-level writing.

As the bar graph above indicates, before the course began, students rated their preparedness for masters-level writing much lower than after they had taken the course. Before taking the course, three students indicated that they did not feel at all prepared when it came to writing their papers. Four students rated themselves at 2, six gave a neutral response by rating themselves at 3, three students felt somewhat prepared, and no student felt very prepared. However, after taking the course, no student rated themselves at a one, which would indicate that they did not feel prepared at all. One student felt somewhat unprepared, five students felt neutral, five students felt somewhat prepared, and five students felt very prepared. Out of these students, two remained neutral in both the pre-course and post-course surveys, and two went back one degree in preparedness. One of these participants who began at a 3 and moved to a 2 after taking the course noted in the post-course survey, “I feel better prepared now but I really don’t know what I’m doing... I always feel like I’m flying by the seat of my pants! This course has helped tremendously!” It is difficult to determine the reason for feeling less prepared after taking

the course, but given that twelve out of sixteen participants experienced a growth in preparedness, it can be determined that the course was overwhelmingly successful in helping these students feel more prepared for their academic writing.

The next prompt asked students, “On a scale of one to five, with five being "very confident," how confident are you that you can write an academic paper?” The results of the surveys are found below.

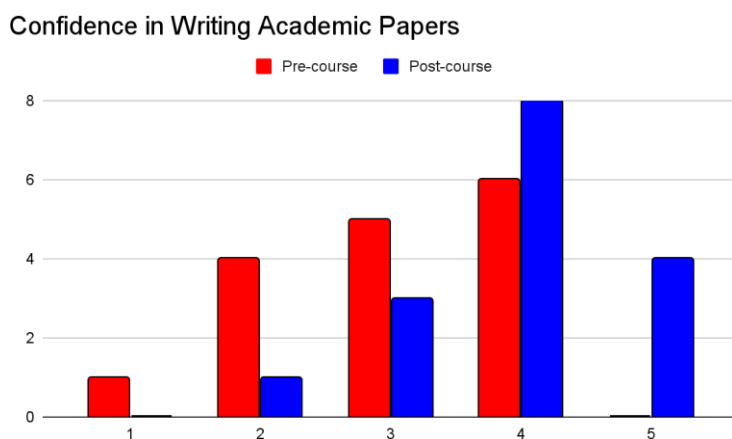


Figure 17: Results from the pre- and post-course surveys showing how many participants felt confident in writing academic papers.

The graph indicates that prior to taking the course, one student did not feel at all confident in his or her ability to write academic papers. Four participants were somewhat unconfident, five were neutral, and six were somewhat confident. No one expressed that they were very confident. After taking the course, none of the students indicated a complete lack of confidence. One confirmed that he or she is somewhat unconfident, three were neutral, eight were somewhat confident, and four were very confident. Out of the sixteen participants, four had not moved in confidence from before taking the course to after. Two participants, however, moved back a degree. Neither of these two students

gave a reason as to why they moved backwards in confidence. It is worth noting, though, that ten out of the sixteen participants did experience growth in confidence when it comes to writing academic papers.

The next survey prompt for the pre-course survey stated, “I am familiar with the Turabian style of citation.” Participants had three options: yes, no, or not sure. No student chose the “not sure” option, twelve (75%) selected “yes,” and four (25%) selected “no.” This prompt was not given again for the post-course survey. Rather, the prompt said, “Explain the Turabian (notes-bibliography style) format.” In order to show that a student understands the Turabian format as used by the school, participants would have to use vocabulary that communicates knowledge. For instance, those who stated that it is a citation style used by United, that it includes notes and a bibliography, or what is included in the footnotes, show that they have an understanding to some degree of the citation style. Out of the sixteen participants, three gave answers that did not necessarily show a lack of understanding, but they did indicate a level of uncertainty. For example, one student stated, “The Turabian (notes-bibliography style) format is the bane of my existence. Enough said.” However, every student at least gained a familiarity with the style through the course.

Next, students were asked to explain what plagiarism is. To communicate an understanding of plagiarism, students would have to say something to the effect of the Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary definition which states, “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own : use (another's production) without crediting the source.”<sup>3</sup> In the pre-course survey, all sixteen students showed an acceptable

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<sup>3</sup> "Plagiarize." Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plagiarize>. Accessed 8/12/2024.

understanding of plagiarism. However, one student said, “Deliberately failing to acknowledge the source or state that it’s not mine.” The biggest problem with this statement is that plagiarism does not necessarily have to be deliberate. In the post-course survey, the answers given were relatively similar to those given in the pre-course survey, albeit many were more nuanced. For example, four participants expressed that one could plagiarize oneself by turning in a paper initially done in another class. This was something that was discussed in the lesson discussing plagiarism. Another student brought up the use of paper mills and AI. This indicates that even though all students could already articulate a definition of plagiarism, there was still some growth in understanding that occurred as a result of taking the academic writing course.

The next survey prompt had students rate their confidence on their ability to write a thesis statement on a scale of one to five, with five being "very confident." The results of the pre- and post-course survey are in the graph below.

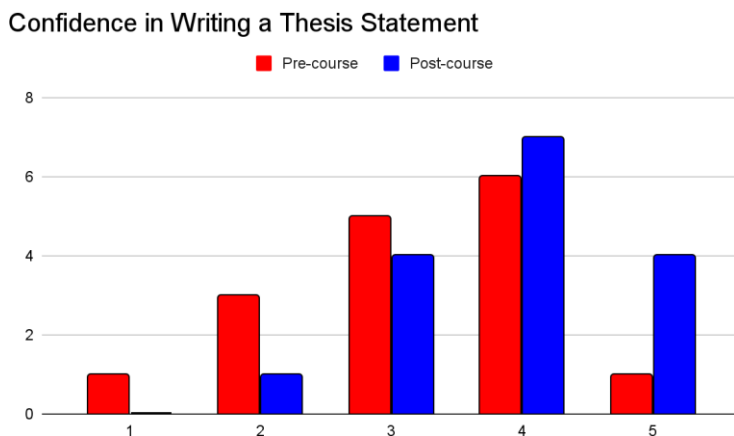


Figure 18: Results from the pre- and post-course surveys showing how many participants felt confident in writing a thesis statement.

The bar graph shows that prior to taking the course, one student expressed no confidence in his or her ability to write a thesis statement. Three students expressed they were somewhat unconfident, five were neutral, six were somewhat confident, and one was very confident. After taking the writing course, no student expressed a complete lack of confidence in writing a thesis statement, one student indicated that he or she was somewhat unconfident, four expressed neutrality, seven communicated being somewhat confident, and four indicated that they were very confident they could write a thesis statement. Of the sixteen participants, five remained at their same level of confidence after taking the course. One other student went from answering “very confident” on the pre-course survey, to “somewhat unconfident” on the post-course survey. Though the student did not indicate a reason for moving back in confidence, a reasonable possibility is that the student may not have been aware of what a thesis statement actually entailed prior to taking the course. Despite this, ten out of sixteen participants expressed positive growth in this area.

The next survey prompt asked participants to define what a thesis statement is. An acceptable response would explain in some form that a thesis statement is one or two sentences in a paper’s introduction giving its main argument. The results from the pre- and post-course surveys are shown in the pie charts below.

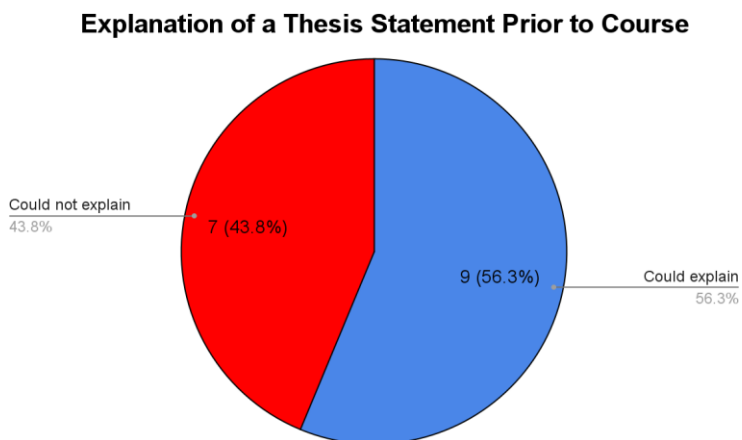


Figure 19: Results from the pre-course survey showing how many participants could adequately explain a thesis statement.

Prior to taking the academic writing course, nine out of sixteen students (56.3%) were able to provide an adequate explanation of a thesis statement. Seven of the participants (43.8%) could not explain or did not attempt to answer the prompt.

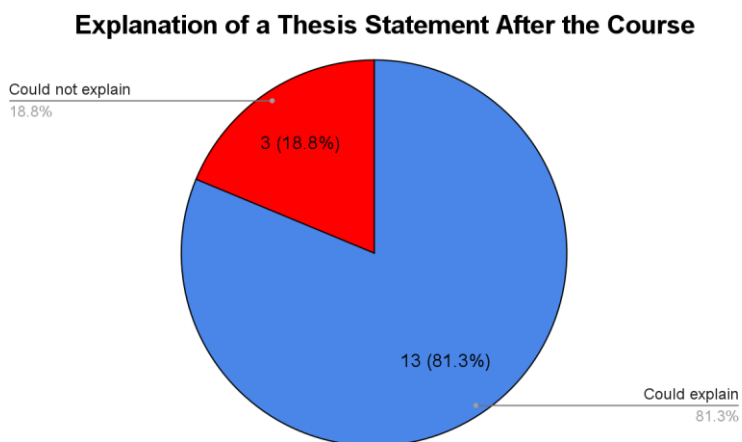


Figure 20: Results from the post-course survey showing how many participants could adequately explain a thesis statement.

After having finished the course, thirteen participants (81.3%) were able to articulate an appropriate explanation of a thesis statement. Some students even gave a more detailed explanation of what a thesis statement entails. Two students were still unable to provide an acceptable answer. One student stated, “This class helped me, but I still need to learn.” It is worth pointing out that this particular student (R3) was one of the participants that remained neutral in the pre- and post-course surveys when asked about the participant’s confidence in writing a thesis statement. One student (R6) did not answer the prompt, nor did this student answer the same prompt in the pre-course survey. Overall, however, there was a recorded growth in understanding among the participants by 44.4%.

The final prompt for the pre-course survey asked participants, “On a scale of one to five, with five being ‘very positive,’ how positive are you that you can write a coherent paragraph?” The bar graph below gives the findings of both the pre- and post-course surveys.

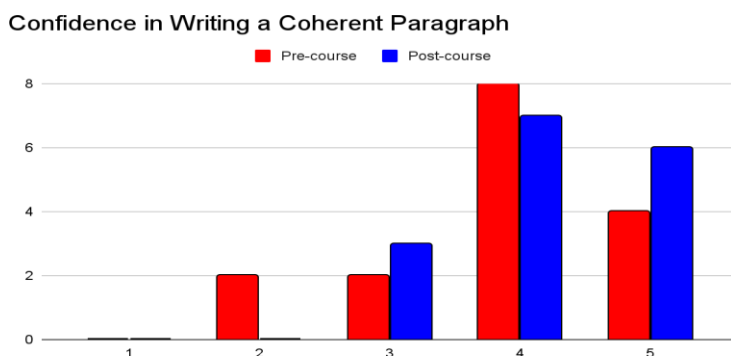


Figure 21: Results from the pre- and post-course surveys showing how many participants felt confident in writing a coherent paragraph.



No student indicated a complete lack of confidence in writing a coherent paragraph in the pre-course survey. However, two students did indicate that they felt somewhat unconfident in their ability. Two more students gave a neutral response, eight indicated being somewhat confident in their ability to write a coherent paragraph, and four students were very confident in their ability to write a coherent paragraph. After taking the course, once again, no student indicated a complete lack of confidence in their ability. Neither did any student express being somewhat unconfident. Three participants were neutral, seven were somewhat confident, and six reported being very confident in their ability to write a coherent paragraph. Of these participants, five students experienced growth in confidence, whereas seven students remained the same in their level of confidence, and three students expressed a regression in confidence in their ability to write a coherent paragraph. It can only be speculated as to why these three participants experienced a regression in confidence, as no one gave a reason. However, it may be worth noting that participant R6 gave a neutral response to all rated questions in the post-course survey, which could communicate complete indifference. Still, in the end, there was some overall growth in the students' paragraph writing confidence.

One piece of information that came from these results is that those who had been in seminary for four terms and over expressed an initial higher sense of confidence than those who were at or below their third term. The chart below shows the average rate at which students expressed confidence. The scale is as follows: one is low, two is medium-low, three is medium (or neutral), four is medium-high, and five is high.

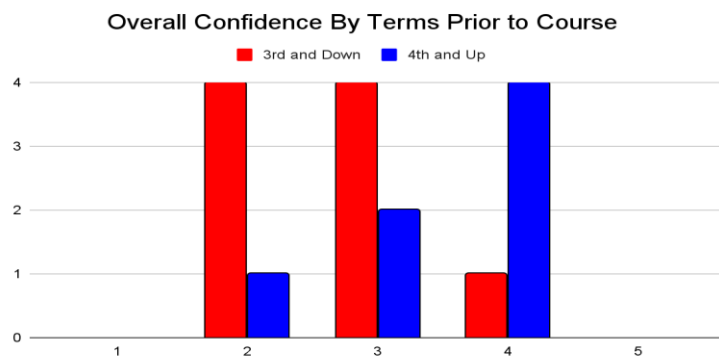


Figure 22: Results from the pre-course surveys showing the students' level of confidence between those in lower terms, and those in higher terms.

Nine students were in a lower term, and seven students were in a higher term.

Those students who initially rated themselves the highest in their confidence had generally been in seminary longer than those who rated themselves on the medium or low end of the spectrum. As far as their growth is concerned, the bar graph below shows where students in their respective terms ended up after taking the course.

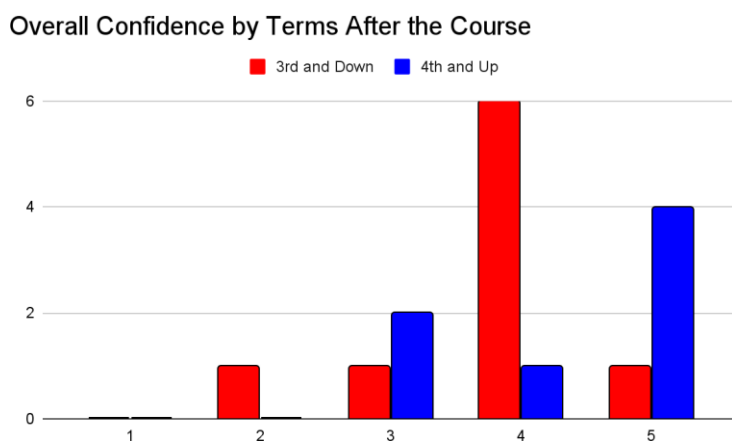


Figure 23: Results from the post-course survey showing the students' level of confidence between those in lower terms, and those in higher terms.

The graph suggests that there was an overall growth between those in the early terms of seminary, as well as those in their later terms. Even though most of those in their fourth term and higher showed high confidence, after taking the course their confidence still elevated.

Some of the students who come to United have no prior degrees, while most others may have their bachelor's or higher. The bar graph below shows the level of confidence of students based on their previous degrees, or lack thereof.

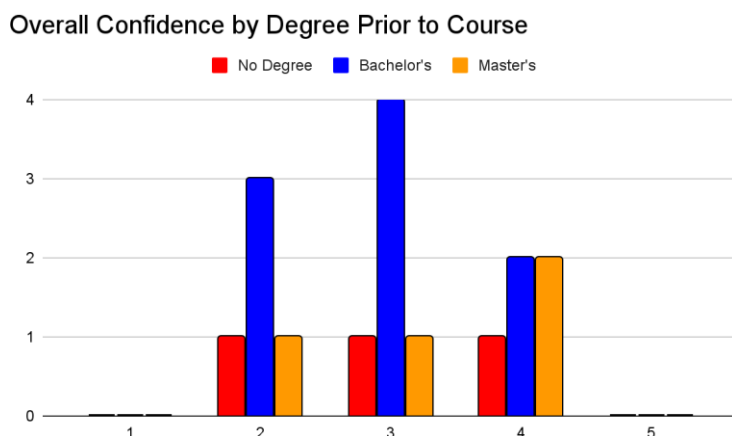


Figure 24: Results from the pre-course survey showing students' level of confidence based on previous degrees.

There are three participants represented who had no previous degree. Their level of confidence varied, with one person being somewhat unconfident, one person in the neutral range, and one person being somewhat confident. Nine people are represented with bachelor's degrees. Their prior confidence also ranged with three participants being somewhat unconfident, four were in the neutral range, and two were somewhat confident. There were four participants with a previous master's degree. Of those, one was

somewhat unconfident. Another was neutral. Two more were somewhat confident. Much growth in confidence took place in all degrees after the course.

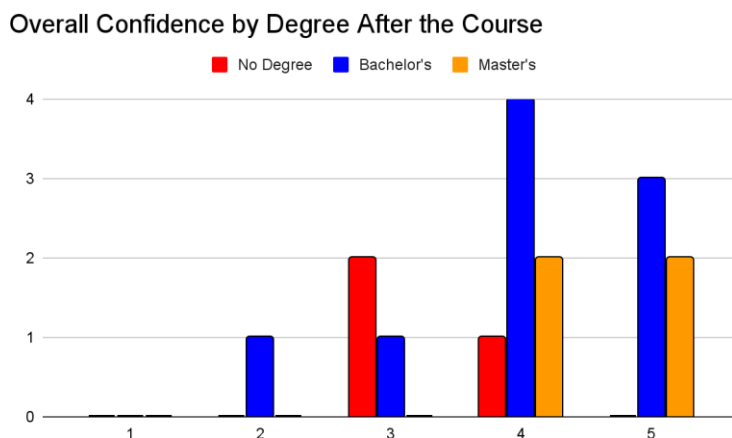


Figure 25: Results from the post-course survey showing students' level of confidence based on previous degrees.

Among the three with no previous degree, two had remained the same in their level of confidence after having taken the course, and one grew in confidence by 1 point. Those with a prior bachelor's degree had shown significant growth with five students progressing. One student showed regression. Three participants remained at the same level as before having taken the course. The data appears to suggest that those with higher degrees had an initial higher level of confidence after taking the course, although there was a trajectory of positive growth among all degrees.

Of those who have previous degrees, those who hold a Bachelor of Arts degree were compared with those who hold a Bachelor of Science degree. Out of thirteen participants, eight have a Bachelor of Arts, while five have a Bachelor of Science.

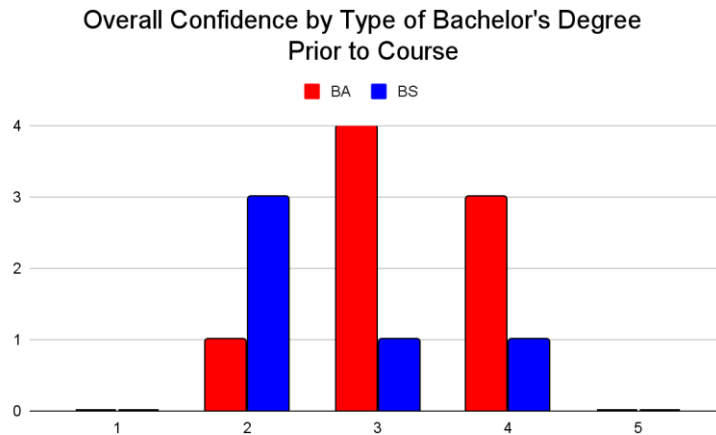


Figure 26: Results from the pre-course survey showing students' level of confidence based on their type of previous bachelor's degree.

Those with a Bachelor of Science degree tended to rank their level of confidence lower than those with a Bachelor of Arts prior to taking the course. This met the expectation, as Bachelor of Science degrees typically require less writing than Bachelor of Arts degrees. However, after taking the course, those with a previous Bachelor of Science degree seemed to rise much more dramatically than those with a Bachelor of Arts after having taken the course.

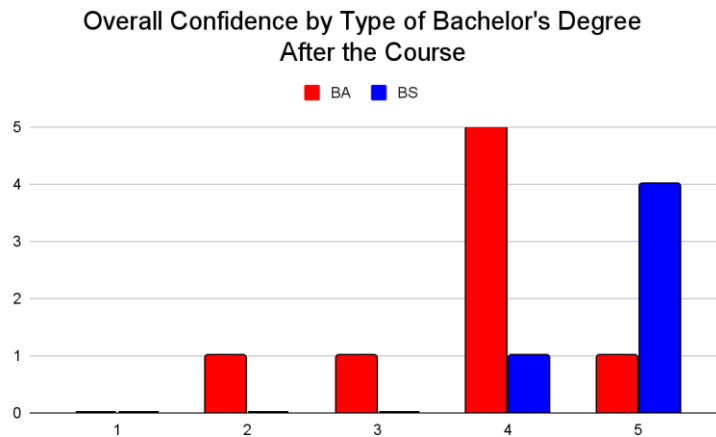


Figure 27: Results from the post-course survey showing students' level of confidence based on their type of previous bachelor's degree.

Among those with a Bachelor of Arts, after taking the course, one person regressed in confidence by 1 point, three remained the same, three progressed by 1 point, and one progressed by 2 points. Conversely, among those with a Bachelor of Science, each one experienced growth, with two students progressing by 3 points, two students progressing by 2 points, and only one progressing by 1 point. It is hard to say why those with a Bachelor of Science degree seemed to experience such a significant amount of growth in confidence when compared to those with a Bachelor of Arts degree, but it is noteworthy.

The project also wanted to compare the level of confidence depending on the number of years since the students' most recent academic degree. In all, four participants had received an academic degree less than one year ago. One student received a degree between one and five years ago. Eleven students had not received a degree in ten years or over.

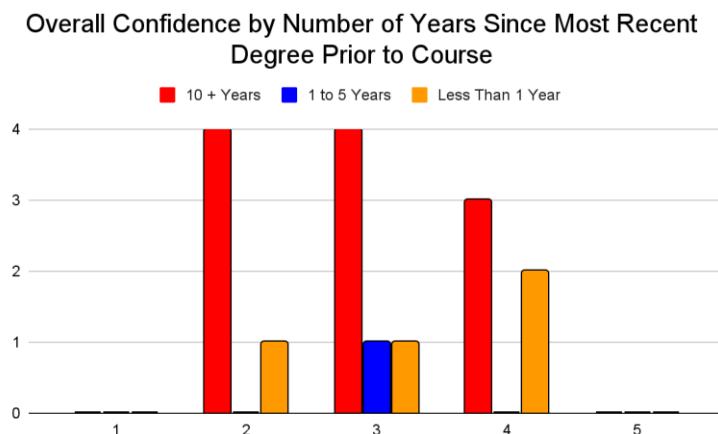


Figure 28: Results from the pre-course survey showing students' level of confidence based on how long it has been since their most recent degree.

Of the four students who received a degree less than one year ago, one was somewhat unconfident, one was neutral, and two were somewhat confident prior to taking the course. The participant who had received a degree between one and five years ago recorded a neutral level of confidence. Out of the eleven students that had been out of school for ten years or longer, four expressed being somewhat unconfident, four recorded a neutral level of confidence, and three recorded being somewhat confident. After taking the course, the results show that the number of years a participant had been out of school seemed to have no effect on the students' progression.

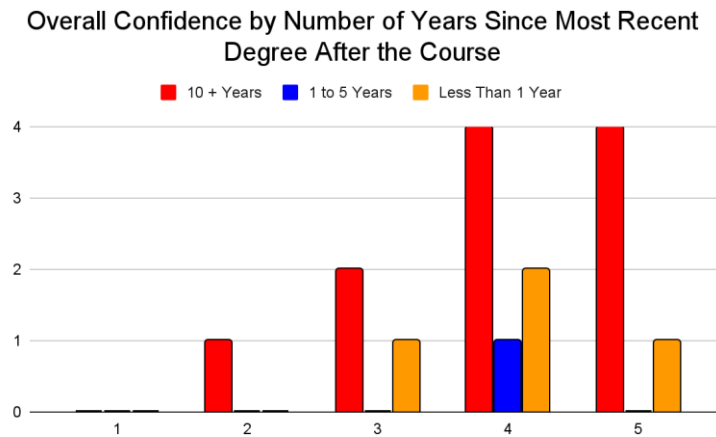


Figure 29: Results from the post-course survey showing students' level of confidence based on how long it has been since their most recent degree.

Among those who had received their degree ten or more years ago, one regressed by 1 point, two stayed the same, four progressed by 1 point, three progressed by 2 points, and one progressed by 3 points. Likewise, the student who had been out of school between one and five years progressed by one point. Out of those who had received their degree less than one year ago, one student regressed by 1 point, one student stayed the same, one student progressed by 1 point, and one student progressed by 3 points. However, it is possible the data might be flawed. Participant R6 is one who claimed to have received a degree less than one year ago. Compared to other answers provided, though, R6 has also been in seminary for four terms. Yet, the participant also stated that he has no previous bachelor's or master's degree. This would either mean that the student came directly out of high school or received an associate's degree, and even took some seminary courses at the same time, or more likely, the student mistakenly selected "Less than one year" in answer to the survey prompt.



The project also wanted to determine where those who have English as a second language would rate themselves in terms of self-confidence before taking the course, and how they would grow in confidence after having taken the course. This represented two out of the sixteen participants.

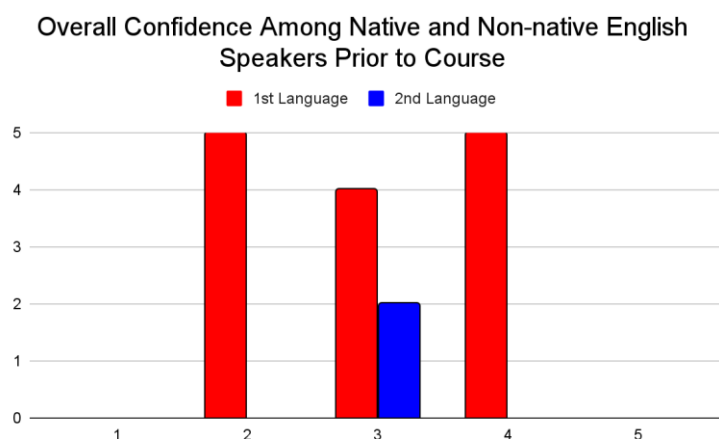


Figure 30: Results from the pre-course survey showing ESL students' level of confidence.

The two participants for whom English is a second language both expressed neutrality when it came to their writing confidence.

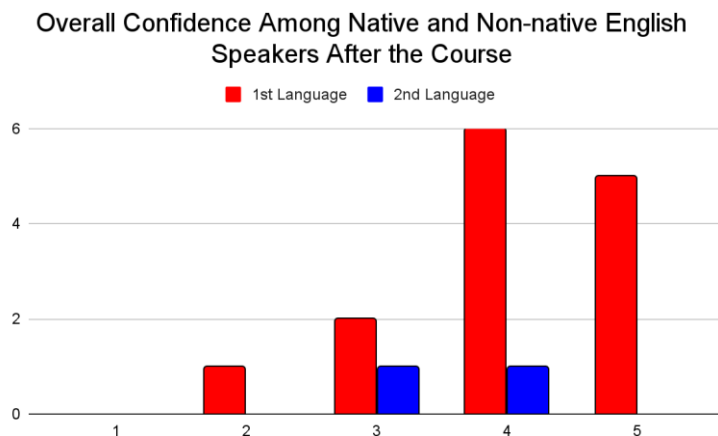


Figure 31: Results from the post-course survey showing ESL students' level of confidence.

After taking the course, R3 stayed neutral in her writing confidence, whereas R8 grew by 1 point. It may be worth noting that R8 also has a previous master's degree and has been out of school between one and five years. The graph, however, indicates that, at least with these two students, there did not seem to be a language barrier standing in the way of their learning. Though, two students is hardly enough to ascertain a firm conclusion.

The post-course survey asked the participants two final questions. The first is, "Did you find this course to be helpful for understanding the basics of academic writing?" It then asked participants to explain why they answered the way they did. In the end, there was a unanimous consensus among the students that the course was indeed helpful in meeting its task. Sixteen out of sixteen participants answered "yes." Four students mentioned the course's helpfulness when it comes to their writing preparation. Other popular topics included the course's success in teaching proper paragraph

formation, citation formatting, and crafting a thesis statement. One student even indicated a desire to take the course again in order to gain more focused concentration on writing.

The final question in the post-course survey asked, “For those who are past your first term of seminary, do you believe this course would have been more helpful during your seminary orientation to help prepare you for the quality of the work to be expected?” Participants were then asked to explain their answers. Those who were in their first term were asked to indicate that fact. Just as in the previous question, students answered with a 100% consensus that the course attached to this project should be a requirement before continuing on to other classes, with only a single student mentioning that he was in his first term. Many of the responses communicated a sense of enthusiasm along with their belief that this course ought to be required before beginning seminary. One student answered, “Without question! ... It is the difference of absolutely knowing what you are doing, versus having no idea. When you have no idea, it makes school, assignments, studies, and papers much more difficult, scary, and anxiety-inducing. Please make this class a requirement either before or very early in the first semester!” Another student responded, “Absolutely. I would have loved this to be part of the orientation! ... [H]onestly, this would have helped my confidence so much. And there’s practical things that [were gone] over in week 5. I would have loved to have that information and not to have had to figure it out on my own!” One other student answered, “This course should be a requirement for orientation. No one should be allowed to take any other course without first taking this one. I could have avoided a lot of stress and late nights if I had taken this course first.” Four students mentioned that this course would be a relief to

students who may be currently experiencing stress and/or anxiety as a result of not having been informed about the nuances of academic writing before.

In the end, the comparison of the pre- and post-course surveys revealed that this course is successful in its goal to prepare seminary students for academic writing. The fact that fifteen out of sixteen participants stated that this course would be helpful prior to starting seminary—or at least in the early stages of seminary—reveals a deep need United may have previously overlooked. The data from the surveys suggest that students of United Theological Seminary, indeed, would benefit from such an orientation course.

#### *Writing Assignments, Reflection Entries, and Questions-and-Answers Forum*

Aside from the pre- and post-course surveys, participants were also to complete assignments as a part of the course. These assignments were also useful in collecting data regarding the usefulness and practicality of the course. Reflection entries were also helpful for understanding where students had begun, and what they were thinking as each topic was being covered. Additionally, a questions and answers forum was helpful to highlight areas in which mistakes may have occurred, or ideas not talked about could be addressed.

Week one did not have an assignment, however, there were reflection questions that were asked in three parts: “Explain your history of writing. Have you ever written academically? What, if any, are some of your concerns about academic writing?” and “How do you believe your writing will help you in your seminary career?” The concerns are the primary focus for the project. This question revealed that the Turabian style of writing was the biggest challenge seminary students felt they encountered, with ten out of

sixteen participants highlighting this. The second biggest challenges involved the development of thesis statements and organizing thoughts, with four students mentioning this factor in their frustrations. Other concerns included fears of accidentally committing plagiarism, discouragement over the style of academic writing, and the number of years since schooling. The project, of course, was designed to address many of these concerns.

The second week's assignment was in two parts. The first had participants write an example of an argument and an assertion. The second had participants write an example of deductive and inductive reasoning. After listening to the lecture, students overwhelmingly showed a positive understanding of argument versus assertion, and inductive versus deductive reasoning. Twelve out of sixteen students immediately grasped the concepts that were being taught. Four students struggled in both parts of the assignment, though they were not necessarily the same students. For example, one student may have understood argument vs. assertion very well, but did not retain a good understanding of inductive reasoning.

For the reflection questions for week two, participants were asked, "What is the difference between an argument and an assertion?" and "How can knowing the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning help you with understanding argument?" To communicate this successfully, students would need to explain that an assertion is an unsubstantiated claim, whereas an argument is backed by evidence and can be proven false. Those who understood that deductive and inductive reasoning will be helpful in identifying logic would also show that they have properly grasped the lecture. When it came to being able to articulate the differences between an argument and an assertion, fifteen participants showed a proper understanding. One person did not complete the

reflection. Additionally, thirteen participants were also able to articulate how knowing the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning could help them with their understanding of argument. Two students had trouble answering this question, and again, one person did not complete the reflection. Overall, the overwhelming majority of participants communicated an understanding of the topics after having watched the video lectures.

Week three's reflection question asked the students, "What are some of the challenges you face when writing a proper thesis statement?" The top response for eight out of the sixteen students involved concerns about creating a thesis with a narrow focus. Others mentioned their concerns involving starting the paper, being concise and to the point, and the placement of the thesis statement within the introduction. Many of these concerns are worked out through practice, and some were discussed in the video lecture.

The assignment for week three had students write a thesis statement with a subject, the argument, and reasoning, after watching the video lecture on crafting thesis statements. Fourteen out of the sixteen students were able to meet the expectations of the assignment, and two showed some difficulty. The results of the assignment, however, proved that the lecture was mostly successful in communicating how to create proper thesis statements.

The fourth week was focused on creating a paragraph and structuring a paper. There were two reflection questions that asked, "How has the M.E.A.L. (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Link to main idea) plan helped you to understand how to write a paragraph?" and "What did you find helpful about the Temple Analogy when it comes to writing your papers?" Many students mentioned that they appreciated the M.E.A.L. plan

because it provided a thesis-based focus as well as a consistent flow. Many also remarked on how the acronym simplified the construction of paragraphs. Some had indicated that their struggle was with evidence versus analysis, and the difference between analysis and the link to the main idea. The lecture mentioned that the evidence provided in a paragraph must also be analyzed, meaning the student should explain how the evidence supports the main idea of the paragraph. Sometimes the analysis itself is the link to the main thesis. Other times, additional information connecting the analysis of the evidence to the main thesis is required. Though two individuals expressed some confusion, most comments praised the M.E.A.L. acronym. Additionally, most participants also praised the Temple Analogy that explains how to construct a paper. Some comments indicated a fondness for the visual representation it creates to help remember the elements of paper crafting. Many also enjoyed the fact that putting the analogy to use would provide a well-structured paper, and that it is all-inclusive, involving all parts that could go into a paper. Two students expressed some dissatisfaction with the analogy, using words like “cumbersome,” “not practical,” and “confusing.” However, the feedback received in the reflections was largely positive.

The assignments for week four involved students writing a paragraph based on their respective thesis statements they wrote in week three, using the M.E.A.L. acronym. This was highly successful as fifteen out of sixteen participants showed a proficient understanding of the acronym. Only one student submitted a paragraph that did not quite meet the standards set for the assignment.

The topics covered in the fifth week involved proper paper formatting and using the Writing Center. The reflection questions for the week asked, “What are some of your

struggles when it comes to formatting your papers?” and “How can the Writing Center benefit you as you write your papers?” The latter question has little to do with the actual project, however students’ answers to the first question provided some useful information. With nine out of sixteen participants raising this concern, the most common problem mentioned with formatting is the use of citations and footnoting in general. Another somewhat common issue among participants is the lack of uniformity among professors at United when it comes to paper formatting. However, the course expressed that though some professors may be stricter than others when it comes to formatting, all professors in general will accept any research paper written in the Turabian (notes-bibliography) style. Two students noted that it was a struggle for them to get used to the idea that not all words are appropriate for academic writing. For example, words like many adverbs, informal language or slang, colloquialisms, and first and second person pronouns are generally not to be used. One participant indicated that out of all topics covered in the course, proper formatting was the most troublesome. Two students mentioned that formatting is the least troublesome for them.

Because properly formatting a paper would likely require writing a full academic paper, there was no homework assignment focused on this aspect of the module. Instead, students were asked to explore the Writing Center’s Canvas page and download two documents that would be useful for formatting assistance. This, however, could not provide any useful data for the project.

The final module, week six, was primarily centered on citing in the Turabian style and plagiarism avoidance. The two reflection questions asked, “What are your concerns when it comes to plagiarism?” and “What is the importance of citing your sources?” In



answering the first question, six students were afraid of using similarly expressed ideas as another author, and getting accused of plagiarism. Four students were concerned about providing full, correct citations, and three students feared accidental plagiarism by forgetting to cite a source used. One participant was bemused by the fact that turning in a previously graded assignment for another course constitutes self-plagiarism. Another participant was bothered with his tendency to over-cite. Raising these alarms indicates a crucial need for a thorough explanation of plagiarism, what it entails, and how to avoid it. On the other hand, 100% of participants agreed with the importance of citing sources. All sixteen individuals cited moral and ethical concerns as their reasoning. For many of these individuals, citing sources is also a matter of their Christian integrity.

The assignment for week six had participants select a quote from David F. Watson's book, *Scripture and the Life of God: Why the Bible Matters More than Ever*, and write the quote using a lead-in. They were then to cite the quote in a footnote format, and then cite it in the bibliography format according to Turabian (notes-bibliography) style. Altogether, all sixteen participants were able to provide a quote with a lead-in, with no problems shown. Fourteen out of sixteen participants created accurate or nearly accurate footnotes. Two students seemed to struggle with the concept. Thirteen out of sixteen participants created accurate or nearly accurate bibliographies. Three participants made a few significant errors in their bibliographies. Six students neglected to italicize the book title. Interestingly, for five out of the six participants, this was in their lead-in. For one student, it was in the bibliography. Three students also had issues with the author's name arrangement in their footnotes. Footnotes in Turabian style require the author's first name to be listed first, followed by the author's last name. For example, in

this case, it would be “David F. Watson.” In the bibliography, it would be last name, then first, or “Watson, David F.” Overall, these are relatively minor details, but they seemed to stand out in terms of accuracy.

The questions and answers forum provided some data, but not much. In the forum, seven students expressed their thanks and/or excitement for the opportunity to take this course to help them improve their academic writing skills. This indicates that there are students who are eager to learn more about the writing requirements for United. Two students even suggested that this course should be a prerequisite before writing any academic papers. One student asked, “Is there any way to get a petition created to have this course adopted as a requirement similar to the orientation we are required to take?” This testifies to the helpfulness the course was able to offer participants.

In addition to this, two students asked questions concerning the capitalization of God’s pronouns. Both pointed out that in some writings it seems that, when referring to God, “he,” “him,” and “his” are often capitalized, but not all the time. This caused these students some confusion, but the issue was clarified in the forum. This might be a topic this course can cover in the future in whatever form it may be presented.

One student had a question about warrants and falsifiability. The question was asked, “If scripture is authoritative, wouldn’t this prove that the statement is not falsifiable?” The answer provided was that it is simply a warrant because it provides the writer’s and possibly the reader’s underlying assumption as Christians. Because this was a seminary student, this student was to assume the reader shares the same belief that scripture holds authority. The claim, then, is still one that can be proven false within the framework. This question, however, indicates that it is possible that the idea of

“warrants” and a claim being “unfalsifiable” may still be too vague, and could possibly use some honing.

The final issue the question and answers forum highlighted was that there was a mistake in one of the video lessons in which examples for inductive and deductive reasoning were reversed. This was the only blatant mistake that was mentioned by a student regarding the video lessons. It was an important point, though, because it was something that needed to be addressed and clarified. In the future, this issue too will need to be addressed.

Taking into consideration all homework assignments, reflections, and the questions and answers forum, there appears to be a formidable consensus that, for United’s purposes, the Academic Writing Orientation Course for Seminary Students would be an essential remedial prerequisite or student orientation. Many students are in need of, and even desire, a course explaining the fundamentals of academic writing. These means of data collection demonstrate that such a course could achieve this. At the same time, the data also shows a few areas that may require some moderate refining.

United’s needs aside, the data positively affirms the usefulness of such a course. United’s remedial writing and theology course “The Craft of Theological Thinking, Reading, and Writing” is indeed quite useful and provides a more detailed look at many of the concepts covered in the project. However, many students do not have the opportunity to take it, whether that is due to limited credit hours, the fact that it is only offered one term each year, or due to lack of interest. Having the condensed course available as an orientation, though, can very well prove to be fruitful not only for incoming students, but also for those students who would simply like to refine their

academic writing skills relatively quickly. Though the consensus among students involved in the project reflects that the course ought to be made mandatory before delving into actual paper writing, the data also seems to show that the orientation could work no matter where one finds his or herself in the program. This opens up many possibilities. However, the question remains if such a course should be made mandatory, or if it should be left up to the student as to how much she or he would like to hone his or her writing skills.

### *Post-Course Interviews*

After completing the course and answering the survey questions, participants were invited to take part in an optional interview to gain more insight into what students thought about the course itself. In all, six students agreed to be interviewed at separate times. Eight questions were asked, and the students were encouraged to answer as honestly as possible.

The first question asked, “What do you believe to be the most helpful lesson of this course? Why?” Respondents, for the most part, had varied answers with the exception of R2 and R5. These students both believed that crafting a thesis statement, which was discussed in week 3, was foundational. R5 stated, “This is the foundation of a good paper. Get this right and it increases the chance of remaining aligned with the goal.” Participant R9 believed that the lesson on structuring a paragraph was the most important, while participant R10 enjoyed the lesson on structuring a paper. Both lessons were in week 4. R10 said she liked the visual aid the Temple Analogy provided, saying, “The temple really helped me because I’m a visual learner anyway, and it helped me to really

think through how you build upon your writing.” R13 believed that the most helpful lesson of the course was the lesson on citations in the final week, while R14 preferred the second week’s lesson on deductive and inductive reasoning. R14 mentioned that, “Having a firm grasp of reasoning is foundational to a good paper.” In all, the various responses the students provided indicate that not one lesson was of greater value than another. More importantly, it implies that each student has his or her own area of concern when it comes to academic writing, so covering many topics is severely needed in order to meet everyone’s needs.

Question two asked, “What lesson do you believe was the least helpful? Why?” Participants R2, R5, and R10 had trouble answering this question, believing that all lessons had their importance. However, participants R9, R13, and R14 each had a separate answer. R9 believed that the lesson from week two which taught on assertion versus argument was weaker than the others because it seemed to be the one that was “mostly common knowledge.” R13 expressed that the lesson covering crafting a thesis statement was the least helpful only because he believed that more could have been explained. R14, on the other hand, was least impressed with the lesson on formatting papers in week five. R14 explained, “[It is] not because it was inferior, but of all of them, it was the least informative.” The responses communicate that some students desire a more thorough explanation of some topics. However, this is not very practical for an orientation class. Even so, the Writing Center could take this into account and provide more video resources separate from the course that could go further into some of the content. The Academic Writing Orientation for Seminary Students course is only designed to teach about the fundamentals of writing as students begin their studies.

The third question asked participants, “Has the course been helpful in your overall understanding of how to write academic papers? Why or why not?” Each of the six participants agreed that the Academic Writing Orientation for Seminary Students course was helpful. R14 replied that the course “made it seem more of a science which can be replicated. R5 indicated that it was not just helpful for learning how to write, but he also found some of the concepts useful when it came to researching as well. Participant R10 said, “I took this course after I had taken another class, and I wish I would have done this class before because it really helped me think through how academic writing is done.” R9 mentioned referring back to the course for assistance when writing citations or other formatting issues. With all six interviewees agreeing for differing reasons that the course was helpful for understanding how to write academic papers, this is solid confirmation that the course was able to meet its goal to help prepare students for their seminary work.

Question four asked, “What elements of academic paper writing, if any, still make you nervous? Why?” Every student conveyed some degree of nervousness. Four participants voiced that citations were still somewhat of a concern, especially more detailed citations. Among citations, R13 also explained that he still has some unease regarding the possibility of accidentally plagiarizing those who have stated similar ideas. R5 would like more information on crafting a paragraph, especially in the M.E.A.L. format explained in the lesson. R10 admitted that there is not much to be nervous about, however, she is a little concerned about meeting the professors’ expectations for their assignments. The most popular answer of citations being a primary burden indicates a possibility that not enough was said about citations, and perhaps the Turabian formatting style in general. However, as mentioned above, this course was only designed to provide

the fundamentals of academic writing. Going too in depth would go beyond the scope of an orientation course. The same can be said for R5's concern about desiring more information regarding crafting a paragraph. Accidental plagiarism is still a legitimate concern, and one that was expressed in the reflections. This might be something that the course could go over with a little more detail.

The fifth question asked, "What, if any, questions, comments, or suggestions relating to academic writing do you have that can help make this course better?" The answers among the participants expressed many different ideas. The one thing R9 would like to see changed is the placing of the topics from the second week. She had previously mentioned that the lesson on assertions versus arguments felt weak apart from the other lessons. The participant suggested that maybe this topic could be explained in the introduction to the class because she considered it "common knowledge." R13 and R10 expressed similar ideas, wishing to have more modules, more explanations, and more time. R5 also seems to have this line of thinking. The participant stated, "It would be useful to include a role play scenario taken from an actual class and demonstrate the process of writing a paper from start to finish." Again, however, this would go against the scope of the project. Still, this is something that the Writing Center could possibly consider as a helpful resource. R13 also desires to see a lesson explaining the writing of a conclusion.

Question six asked, "What, if any, aspect of academic paper writing would you like to know more about?" Most of the answers the participants offered were centered around desiring more time for the course. For example, R13 would like to go more in depth regarding creating concise thesis statements. R10 stated a desire for more time

simply for practicing and building up writing skills. R9 wanted more time focused on detailed citations. Participant R14 stated, “I think [I would like to know more about] various structures of the paper.” Each of these responses shows a desire for more time devoted to this course. Pragmatically, this would not work for an orientation, especially one created only to discuss the basics of academic writing. Likewise, R5 asked, “How can I expand and transition academic material into a form digestible by non-academics? ... How can I make my research more than an academic activity?” This, of course, goes far beyond the basics into practicalities. The whole seminary experience is one in which a student wrestles with applying head knowledge to heart knowledge. For this reason, the Contextual Ministries course offered by United is more suitable to addressing such needs than the Writing Center, especially in an academic orientation. Though each of these responses are sensible, they seem to transcend the purview of the course.

The seventh interview question asked participants, “Do you believe that God has brought you to United Theological Seminary for a purpose?” All respondents answered the question affirmatively. The intention of this question was to see if any participant had any doubts as to whether or not attending seminary was a part of their calling as opposed to an obstacle standing in the way of their “true” calling. This question was not asked in a way that would communicate its intended purpose, nor was there a way to measure any change in this area, and so the data from the answers to this question has no actual value or relevance to the project.

The eighth and final question of the interview asked, “Do you believe you will utilize the services of the Writing Center in the future as you work through your master’s degree? Why or why not?” The purpose of the project was to see whether or not an



orientation course about the basics of academic writing would be helpful for students. However, the project was also useful for reminding students that United has a Writing Center that can be a useful resource available for many of their academic needs. The implementation of the course as a project showed the capabilities United's Writing Center has to assist students with their academic writing. For this reason, the question is highly relevant. Respondents R10 and R2 stated that they would most definitely be utilizing the Writing Center in the future. R14, on the other hand, was largely unaware of the Writing Center and how helpful it can be. He stated, "I might now that I know it's there," though he did express feeling more confident after having taken the course. R13 would like to use the Writing Center, and even "anticipates it," but hasn't yet needed it. R9 commented, "Yes, and I probably will. It's mostly that I feel I get things done so, not at the time it's due that I don't have time to send it to [the Writing Center]." This is understandable, given the fact that the Writing Center needs a seventy two-hour notice to accommodate students. However, the Writing Center also offers many resources that do not necessarily require a student to submit a paper. Finally, participant R5 answered, "I probably will not. ... I graduate in December and do not expect to have too many more papers to write." The responses acquired give an analysis into what many students at United might think and feel about utilizing the Writing Center. Some believe they have no real need for it. Some students know how beneficial it would be. Other students may not even be aware of its existence, while a portion of students, like R9, feel as if their procrastination would keep them from seeking help from the Writing Center. In all, though the question was relevant, it did not reveal anything that was not already known.

The primary gleaning from the interview responses seemed to be the desire for more time for the course. Though this course specifically was designed for a basic overview that would not take much time for students to complete, it communicates a desire for what United already offers through the course “The Craft of Theological Thinking, Reading, and Writing,” or “TH500.” TH500, up until the Spring term of 2025 has only been offered one term per academic year. By making this course available for two terms per year, it allows more students to take the course and help learn the basics of academic writing and theological thinking. Students who wish the orientation course to be longer could find solace in that fact. However, it is relevant to point out that because many students felt the need that the orientation course ought to be required, while at the same time, many believed that it was too short, perhaps it would be fitting for United to consider TH500 to be a requirement for all or most incoming students in their first semester. In all, the data suggests that students do not believe they come in to seminary knowing enough, and they desire preparation to succeed.

### **Conclusion**

“The Academic Writing Orientation for Seminary Students” was predominantly successful in affirming the hypothesis that if students participate in the online academic writing orientation course, they will be better prepared to write master’s-level work. The foundations were of great use to express the importance of the role academic writing plays in a student’s preparation to become a better, more knowledgeable and experienced minister. The Biblical foundation in which the story of the patriarch, Joseph, is discussed, expressed the importance of God setting apart certain times and places for the sake of the

preparation of those who will carry out his will. In the same way, students are called to seminary as a time of preparation in which they will face some trials—academic paper writing being a major one—that are designed to stretch them and help them grow into well-formed ministers. The Historical foundation discussed clergy educational formation in early Methodism. This showed that educational formation for Methodist ministers has always been a priority in the church. Though not all students at United are a part of a Wesleyan denomination, United is a United Methodist school of higher learning. As such, it is a part of the Wesleyan heritage that has, historically, sought to combine knowledge with practical application to create well-rounded ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Academic paper writing in seminary serves to help students think through positions and learn to articulate their thoughts. It also challenges students to move past their perceived limitations, questioning personal biases, and seeking to learn from what others have had to say about a given topic. The Theological foundation addressed St. Bonaventure's theology of seeking higher knowledge. For Bonaventure, growing in knowledge is growing in the knowledge of God. Therefore, if a person is seeking to learn, the person is seeking God. Education, then, is a part of loving God with all of one's mind. This is the purpose of seminary. It is not to collect knowledge for the sake of having knowledge. Rather, it is to know and love God more intimately. Finally, the Interdisciplinary foundation covered basic academic writing. Given that learning to write academically was the chief task of the project, an overview of the purpose of academic writing in seminary was necessary to establish a framework for the course. Ultimately, academic writing provides a way for students to engage with the thoughts of others through their research. This engagement pushes students and helps to make them a voice

of authority in a certain field. However, this is not for the sake of students to simply collect knowledge, but learn how to apply this knowledge to their ministry setting.

In all, students attending seminary are taking part in a call from God to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Theological and ministerial education helps students to do this in a disciplined and regimented way. Though not all in the church are called to attend Christian higher education, those who find themselves in seminary can be assured that the goal of seminary is to form students in Christian leadership, preparing them to become better ministers.

Preparedness in this project was mostly measured in self-assuredness and the participants' rating in their own confidence. The data overwhelmingly supports that the course played a significant role in boosting confidence. The vast majority of participants rated their confidence higher after taking the course than before taking the course. This indicates that the objectives of the project were being met, at least by the students' own measurements. At the same time, homework assignments showed that students were, by and large, replicating what was being taught in the lessons. The discussion forum, reflections, and personal interviews suggested that many students were, overall, satisfied with what they had been able to gain in the course. Some even expressed a desire to go more in depth, or have more time devoted to topics concerning academic writing. Most importantly, collected data revealed that all students who took part in this project believed that the academic writing course would have served them better had it been offered as an orientation before having to write any papers. Some even suggested that the course ought to be required. The project, then, was indeed successful at meeting its aims, not only to offer students assistance, but to prove the necessity of such a course.

An area of weakness for the project was in proving an assumption that many students do not know why they are in seminary. The evidence for such is anecdotal at best and is not supported by any of the collected data. For example, those being interviewed were asked, “Do you believe that God has brought you to United Theological Seminary for a purpose?” Every participant claimed to have an understanding of why they were in seminary and agreed that their time at United fits their calling. This was not the expected response. It could be that the question should have been addressed more broadly in the pre-course survey and confirmed or flatly denied in the post-course survey. Surely, with a larger sample size, there would be some who do not know their exact purpose for being in seminary. Still, given the results of the project, this is only speculation based off personal anecdotes. However, because the goal of the project was to demonstrate a need for an orientation course on academic writing, the idea only served as something of a secondary hypothesis that may have stood outside the scope of the course anyway. Still, the thought is worth reinforcing that because students are in seminary for a divine purpose, it is wise to trust United’s academic process.

Other considerations include the vocalized desire by many participants to have more time devoted to the course. Several students wished to go more in depth with topics like crafting thesis statements, citations, and constructing paragraphs. The Writing Center will have to evaluate the needs in order to discover what would be practical to include, if this course were to eventually become an orientation in United’s master’s curriculum. Orientation courses are typically short by design. It could be that some of these ideas need to be better explained in their respective lessons, yet the primary idea for the orientation course is to give the basic fundamentals of academic writing. The Writing

Center itself offers a plethora of resources for students to consider if they need more extensive help. Additionally, TH500 is a remedial course that explains academic writing and research in more detailed and thorough ways that an online orientation course is not designed to do.

One surprising factor from this project is that none of the participants had ever been diagnosed with a learning disability. It would be interesting to see the ways in which the results would have been affected if this were the case. Likewise, only two participants were students who had a native language other than English. This did not provide enough data to show if this would have been a factor either. Interestingly enough, the project did somewhat show that those with Bachelor of Science degrees had less confidence in their academic writing capabilities than those with Bachelor of Arts degrees. This is likely due to the fact that, typically, Bachelor of Arts degrees tend to require more writing in their programs. However, those with Bachelor of Science degrees showed more growth in their confidence after having taken the course. It is unclear why this would be the case, but it is certainly noteworthy and goes to show that anyone can learn the principles of academic writing.

Another observation is that students seemed to grow less in areas in which they were asked to define certain words or ideas. For example, when asked to explain United's writing standards, in the initial survey, six people could do so adequately. In the post-course survey, seven people could do so adequately. Growth took place, but it was little. Likewise, little growth was perceived when students were asked about defining "thinking theologically." In the pre-course survey, four participants could provide a definition. After taking the course, only three additional people out of sixteen were able to provide a

definition. This communicates that there may not have been enough stress placed on defining and explaining these ideas and words throughout the lessons. However, the more important factor is the growth in confidence perceived after taking the course, and the overwhelmingly strong desire of participants to see this course offered before classes are offered. In the end, being able to define terms for the sake of the project matters little. True results are seen in the growth of confidence, which will lead to writing stronger papers. Like most crafts, though, this really comes through practice.

Some things can be put into place to make this course much more successful if it were to actually become a part of United's curriculum. First, as an orientation course, the homework assignments should likely be optional. Though participants showed that they were successful in their homework assignments, it may not be practical outside of a project. At the very least, the course should do away with reflection questions, and keep any other kind of assignment at a minimum. In the same way, the course should be pared down in terms of length. Participants were asked to complete this course in no fewer than six weeks. This is mostly because of the needs of the course meeting the Doctor of Ministry program parameters, but also it was so students could take at least a week to think about their learnings from module to module. However, as an orientation, six weeks is too long. The course ought to be able to be completed within one or two days. This is possible, but probably not with the assignments attached to each module. It would be better, then, if assignments were kept to a minimum. Though some participants expressed a desire to see the course cover more topics, or provide a more thorough explanation of certain topics, the extra amount of time would not be conducive to an academic orientation. Additionally, it would probably be advantageous to students if the course was

accessible, not just during an orientation, but at a student's need. That way, students can revisit certain topics in their own time, as some had expressed they did with this project. Perhaps it would be good for United to have the course perpetually available on Canvas. As mentioned earlier, it would also be prudent for United to consider making TH500 a required course so that everyone has access to the important information regarding the basics of academic writing from the start.

Altogether, the Academic Writing Orientation for Seminary Students course met its objective, showing that such an orientation can work and should be implemented for students who are entering seminary. This project showed that students would be saved from much heartache, stress, and anxiety if a writing orientation course were made available before students begin writing their papers. Also, it will serve as one more way that United, through the Writing Center, could meet its purpose by preparing "faithful and fruitful Christian leaders to make disciples of Jesus Christ."



## **APPENDIX A**

### **PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY QUESTIONS**

### **Pre-Course Survey Questions**

1. How many terms have you been in seminary? (Short answer)
2. I have a bachelor's degree and/or a previous master's degree. (Yes [bachelors], Yes [masters], or No)
3. If "yes," is your bachelor's degree a BS or a BA? (A. BS, B. BA)
4. I have written academic papers before. (Yes, No, or Not Sure)
5. How many years has it been since your most recent academic degree? (A. Less than one year; B. One to five years; C. Six to ten years; D. More than ten years)
6. English is my first language. If no, explain. (Yes, No, Fill in the blank)
7. Have you been diagnosed with a learning disability, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, or other? If yes, please explain (Yes, No, Fill in the blank)
8. To the best of your knowledge, explain United's academic writing standards. (Short answer)
9. In your understanding, what is academic writing, and how does it differ from other forms like sermons, journaling, etc. If you do not know, that answer is sufficient. (Short answer)
10. What is your purpose for attending seminary? If you do not know, that answer will be sufficient. (Short answer)
11. In your seminary experience so far, have any of your writing assignments felt like "busy work"? Explain. If you are entering your first term, say, "This is my first term." (Short answer)
12. Explain "thinking theologically." If you don't know, that answer will be sufficient. (Short answer)
13. On a scale of one to five, with five being "very prepared," how prepared do you feel for masters-level writing at United Theological Seminary?
14. On a scale of one to five, with five being "very confident," how confident are you that you can write an academic paper? Explain your answer. (Short answer)
15. I am familiar with the Turabian style of citation. (Yes, No, or Not Sure)
16. Explain what plagiarism is. (Short answer)

17. On a scale of one to five, with five being “very confident,” how confident are you that you can write a thesis statement?
18. Explain what a thesis statement is.
19. On a scale of one to five, with five being “very positive,” how positive are you that you can write a coherent paragraph?

### Post-Course Survey Questions

1. Explain United's academic writing standards. If you do not know, that answer is sufficient. (Short answer)
2. In your understanding, what is academic writing, and how does it differ from other forms like sermons, journaling, etc. If you do not know, that answer is sufficient. (Short answer)
3. After taking the course, have you developed a new appreciation for your writing assignment(s) that, at that time, may have felt like "busy work"? Explain. If you are entering your first term, say, "This is my first term." (Short answer)
4. Explain "thinking theologically." If you do not know, that answer is sufficient. (Short answer)
5. On a scale of one to five, how prepared do you feel for master's-level writing at United Theological Seminary? Explain. (Short answer)
6. On a scale of one to five, with five being "very confident," how confident are you that you can write an academic paper?
7. Explain the Turabian (notes-bibliography style) format. If you don't know, that answer is sufficient. (Short answer)
8. Explain what plagiarism is. (Short answer)
9. On a scale of one to five, with five being "very confident," how confident are you that you can write a thesis statement?
10. Explain what a thesis statement is. (Short answer)
11. On a scale of one to five, with five being "very positive," how positive are you that you can write a coherent paragraph?
12. Did you find this course to be helpful for understanding the basics of academic writing? Explain your answer. (Short answer)
13. For those who are past your first term of seminary, do you believe this course would have been more helpful during your seminary orientation to help prepare you for the quality of the work expected in seminary? Explain your answer. (Short answer)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **POST-COURSE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Post-Course Interview Questions**

1. What do you believe to be the most helpful lesson of this course? Why?
2. What lesson do you believe was the least helpful? Why?
3. Has the course been helpful in your overall understanding of how to write academic papers? Why or why not?
4. How has this course changed your outlook on academic writing?
5. How do you think this course has helped prepare you for academic writing?
6. What elements of academic paper writing, if any, still make you nervous? Why?
7. What, if any, questions, comments, or suggestions relating to academic writing do you have that can help make this course better?
8. What, if any, aspect of academic paper writing would you like to know more about?
9. Do you believe that God has brought you to United Theological Seminary for a purpose?
10. Do you believe you will utilize the services of the Writing Center in the future as you work through your master's degree? Why or why not?

**APPENDIX C**  
**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

## Reflection Questions

### *Module 1*

1. Explain your history of writing. Have you ever written academically? What, if any, are some of your concerns about academic writing?
2. How do you believe your writing will help you in your seminary career?

### *Module 2*

1. What is the difference between an argument and an assertion?
2. How can knowing the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning help you with understanding argument?

### *Module 3*

1. What are some of the challenges you face when writing a proper thesis statement?

### *Module 4*

1. How has the M.E.A.L (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Link to main idea) helped you to understand how to write a paragraph?
2. What did you find helpful about the Temple Analogy when it comes to writing your papers?

### *Module 5*

1. What are some of your struggles when it comes to formatting your papers?
2. How can the Writing Center benefit you as you write your papers?

### *Module 6*

1. What are your concerns when it comes to plagiarism?
2. What is the importance of citing your sources?



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